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The Popular Magazine

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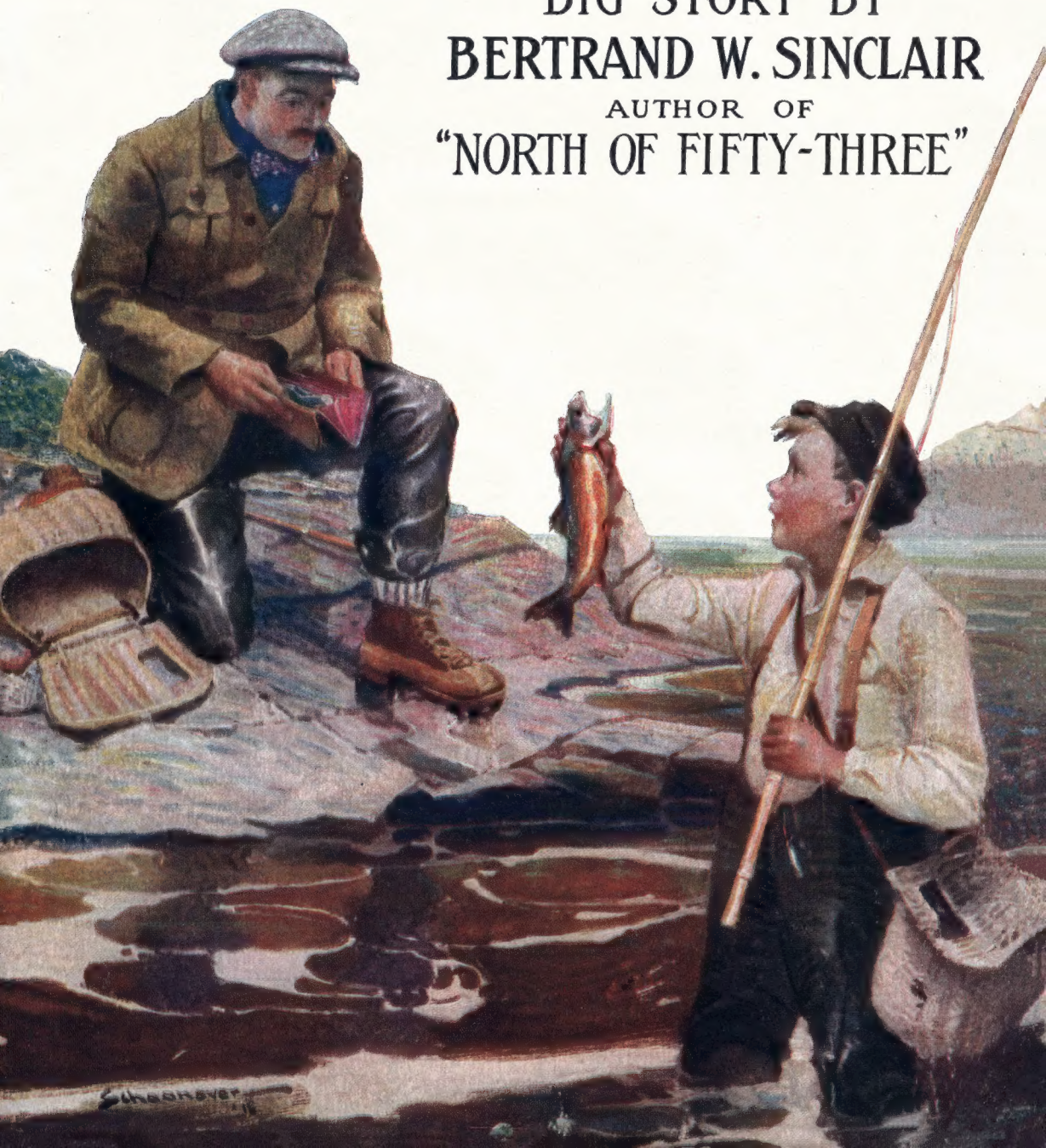
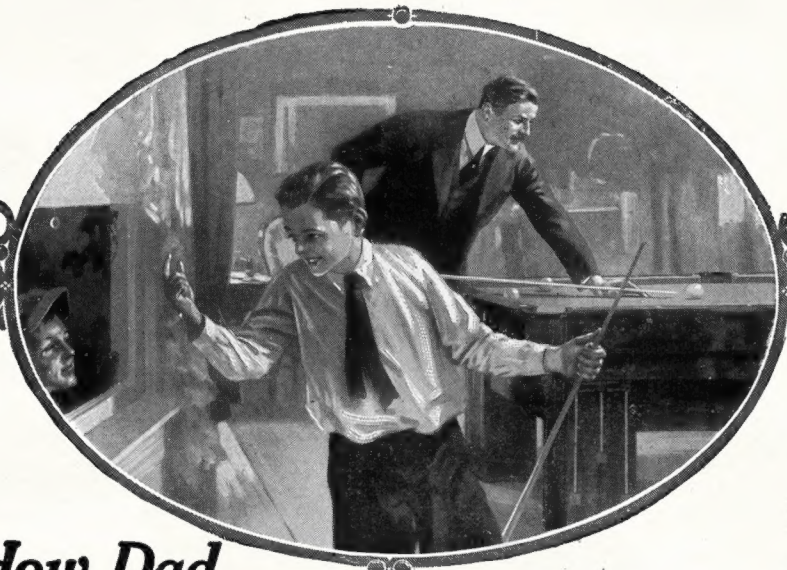
BIG STORY BY
BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR
AUTHOR OF
"NORTH OF FIFTY-THREE"





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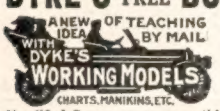

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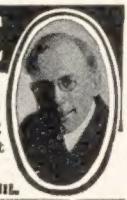

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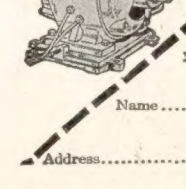

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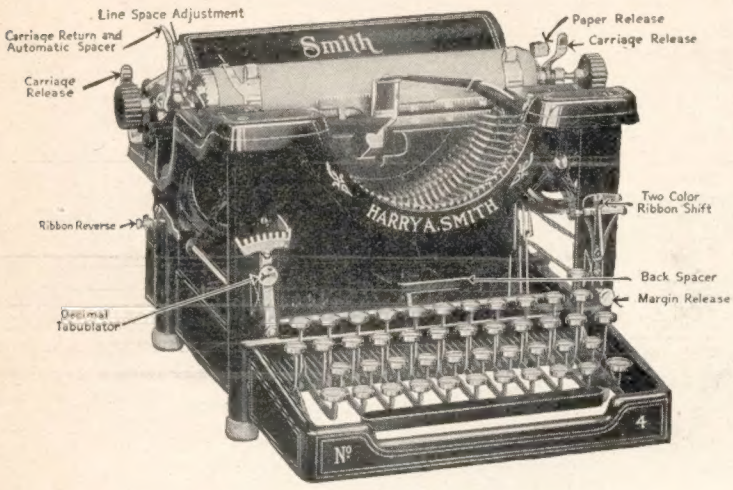

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

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The Metal Workers

By George C. Shedd

Author of "The Isle of Strife," "The Princess of Forge," Etc.

The career of a man who, much against his will, comes into possession of a piece of property that had been colored by the red hand of disaster, and the history of which smacked of a Greek tragedy. His trip South brings him in touch with certain men who call themselves "metal workers," but whose output is a mystery till he hits upon the astounding solution. There is a plot within a plot, and it has to do with a partner thrust upon the new owner—a young woman who is enmeshed in the double mystery. A novel of cumulative interest.

(*A Complete Novel*)

CHAPTER I.

CONCERNING AN UNPOPULAR PROPERTY.

FOR my uncle, James McIntyre, I have always maintained a sincere respect, notwithstanding that in most matters our views and our natures are diametrically opposed. His person is the very rod of respectability. He is a spare man, with gray hair, penetrating gray eyes, a close-trimmed gray beard, and a pallid, impassive face; he speaks in deliberate tones, his movements are calm, his plans are ever carefully calculated, his breakfast eggs are boiled exactly two and three-quarter minutes. I am his reverse: I utter words as a cheerful and careless spirit moves me, change plans whenever I can flash better ones, and eat eggs cooked in any fashion that is palatable. In financial affairs we exhibit a like contrast: He being an armor-plated, shell-proof, invulnerable dreadnaught; I a summer pleasure craft, frequently fast on rocks, or high and dry on the stays for repair.

With considerable satisfaction, then, I learned one day that an enemy had lodged a shot in his ammunition hold. At the time I was apprised of this rare fact in his office, where I had come at his request, he admitted the damage with a surprising docility as he paced to and fro, hands comforting each other under the tails of his austere frock coat.

"The investment, it appears, will not turn out well, unless fresh measures are taken for its resuscitation," he stated.

"So you are stung," I commented, extending my legs and taking my ease. "I'd never have believed it, Uncle Jim.

This is a great blow to my faith in you."

"Your solicitude is exceedingly precious," he replied dryly.

As he said nothing more, I went on: "Do you wish to inform me of the harrowing details of this disaster?"

"Such was my purpose, Thomas, in requesting you to come here—that, and to make requisition on your most excellent assistance."

I sighed. "Whenever you talk that way, there's always something unpleasant ahead—the weather sign never fails."

"On the contrary, my boy, the heavens show their fairest for you. I'm about to afford you a rich opportunity for the exercise of your latent abilities."

"Now I know it's bad," I grumbled. "Well, shoot your musket." And I settled back in my chair, prepared to hear the worst.

My uncle pursued his meditative pace in silence for a little, then paused to stroke his beard.

"I'll start at the beginning," he said. "The investment in question was brought to my attention by a friend whose interest had been enlisted by a promoter of good reputation. After consideration of the enterprise, I was convinced money was to be made out of it. Nevertheless, because of its speculative character, I would never have joined in the scheme had not my friend once rendered me a great, a very great, service. On this account, more than for personal profit, I embarked in his project."

"Uncle, you arouse my contempt—a financier owning such a thing as a grateful heart!"

"Please don't interrupt," said he. "The plan was to buy a large body of cheap timberland on the northwestern coast of Florida, saw the pine into lumber, resell the stumpage ground, in small tracts, for fruit and garden purposes, to which the land could be advantageously adapted, promote, in addition, a winter resort on the coast, and thus, in several ways, develop the property. My friend and I accordingly joined equally and bought the tract, some fifty thousand acres, whereupon the promoter set to work; he got into touch with a substantial Southern lumber firm; he surveyed and subdivided the land; he started the resort to the extent of building several cottages and of publishing pamphlets about the resort; he initiated negotiations with the near-by railroad for the building of a branch to the town, and then——"

"And then?" I repeated.

"The man suddenly died of a fever."

"Extremely careless of him," said I, with a profound air.

"Careless, perhaps; nevertheless, he died. My friend and partner in the enterprise thereupon himself undertook to carry out the affair, but he had hardly got matters well in hand, when his launch capsized one afternoon in a squall, and all on board were lost."

At this stage in the narrative, I felt a need of expression.

"Uncle, you've stated that you asked me here for advice," I remarked, in a solemn tone.

"Yes, so I did," he answered, letting his eye rest on me.

"Then I'll give you my opinion at once," I went on. "This project smacks too much of Greek tragedy—those in it stand no chance whatever of preserving life. Withdraw, decamp, cut, and run before Nemesis takes you, too, by the hair! Consider that sequence of fatalities, contemplate the deaths of those other men. A plain warning!"

He again eyed me, then took another turn about the room.

"The investment at present looks as if it would go by default," he continued, with an air apparently of never having heard my admonition, "as

there's no one to look after it. I've no time to give to the matter personally, among my other many affairs of greater importance. As to withdrawing for the reason you state, I confess that I remain unmoved: Greek tragedies are scarcely up to date in our century. Under ordinary circumstances, I'd see that the project was pushed to a successful termination; but because I've too many other weightier interests, I've decided to discontinue my personal connection with it. As I've sometimes heard you tersely phrase the idea, I've 'stood from under.'"

"Good work," I rejoined heartily.

"I've deeded the property away—given it away, in fact."

This was an opportunity to moralize, as I love to do when it is a moral applying to a second person.

"Get rid of a jinx whenever you can, even if you have to make a gift of it to some one," was my sage rejoinder.

"I have done so. I've even had my share in the estate legally transferred to a new beneficiary," came in a pleased voice.

"Ah, once more you can breathe freely, Uncle James."

"Yes—but listen. In spite of the fact that my personal interest in the undertaking has ceased, I still believe the original plan, when carried out, will be a success. It needs but the right man to handle it. It's full of possibilities, great possibilities."

"So is a bottle of strychnine," I suggested. "On which of your enemies did you hoist this man-killer?"

He smiled his cold, even smile, at the same time tossing his coat tails with a satisfied little flop.

"The recipient of my share in the property is not an enemy," he remarked, pursing his lips. "He's a young man of whom I hope much: twenty-eight years old, strong, vigorous, an athlete, and a fairly intelligent fellow; yes, I may say, fairly intelligent. If pushed to the point, he will, I believe, develop business talent—but he needs pushing. What is necessary to bring about this much-to-be-desired consummation is the right opportunity, and, of course, the concomitant obstacles. To be brief, the young man's name is Thomas Masson."

Immediately I stiffened, sat staring at him, glaring at him. Then I found my voice.

"What, I!"

"You, Thomas. Yes, you're now half owner of the property—and please don't bellow in that distressing manner"—he lifted a protesting hand—"my clerks will be bursting in the door to see what's happened. Calm yourself."

"I—I the owner of that thing!" I vociferated.

"Such is the case. But you express your gratitude in strange terms, it appears to me."

I leaped to my feet.

"There's no gratitude in it. I don't want your gift! Why, this is next to murder! I want to live a while, Uncle Jim, and, in the name of all that's sensible, what shall I do with a winter resort and a million cabbage patches?"

"Do what the promoter planned to do, certainly."

"Promoters finish in jail. This is a fine prospect for me: Death on one side, prison on the other. You're no flesh and blood of mine, I plainly see that." And I pulled out a cigar and viciously bit off the end. "When father died, leaving you as my adviser, or whatever it was, he never had in mind you'd pick out the most dangerous business in America for me to enter."

With the maddening indifference he so well could assume, he said: "Of course, you may do as you please in the matter."

"Of course, I can't do anything of the kind," I retorted, beginning to stride about the room.

"You'll feel better after you've thought it over."

"Pish and tush! When am I to take hold of this tropical tarantula? Next spring? No, I won't do it; I can't do it! I want to pass away peacefully in bed when I die. Is it to be next spring?"

"To-night."

For two or three minutes I stood, unmoving, congealed, the unlighted cigar clenched and forgotten between my teeth.

"Why this delay? Why not this afternoon?" I inquired, at last, with all the sarcasm I could muster.

"The faster trains for the South leave in the evening. Do you know what you'll do when you arrive there?"

"Where?"

"At the town of Cericia, at your winter resort, at headquarters."

"I do not, except to choose my cerements and funeral meats," was my savage response.

He considered.

"It first will be necessary to call on my late friend's heir—that is, on your partner—and for the two of you to reach some agreement as to what policy will be adopted concerning the property, whether to carry out the original plans or to devise new ones, for the promotion of the business."

"What's he like, this partner?" I asked, in an inimical voice. For I divined instantly I should not get on with the fellow.

"He? Your partner is not a 'he,'" was his response.

"Then a woman! His wife, his widow, his weepy relict! By heavens, I understand why you've dumped this infernal graveyard off on me!" I thundered.

My uncle removed one hand from under his coat tails and again stroked his beard, still smiling.

"His daughter, merely. A very estimable young lady, I believe—well reared, well educated, refined, and, in this particular crisis in her affairs, in need of a practical, level-headed, hard-working partner."

"That's me, isn't it?" I scoffed.

"I trust you'll prove such—I yet expect to see you develop into an able business man, like your father."

The gravity of this embroilment each instant grew weightier, until finally it appalled me. To be flung by the crop into a mess of which I knew nothing; indeed, for which I was wholly unfitted; to have for a partner a girl whom I had never seen and who knew no more about the property than did I—it was too much, too much!

"I can't do it," said I; "no, I can't do it. Let some one else play my part in this Babes-in-the-Woods tragedy."

"You're eminently suited, I'd say," he replied, with a sidewise glance. "And there's nothing to be alarmed at."

I lifted both hands in protest.

"Very well. But I'll see no more of *her* than is absolutely necessary," said I, with firmness.

"Where women are concerned, one should never prophesy. Now, listen. There's more yet to be told," he said, with a mien all at once grown serious. "It appears there's a conspiracy afloat, if I may use so melodramatic a term, to rob this young lady and you of the property. I'll go so far, Thomas, as to say you're on an adventure; if I were younger, I believe I myself should enlist on it."

"How! What! You mean it!" I cried.

"I do. Really, I ought to place the matter in the hands of officers of the law; but, before taking that step, I judged a private investigation should be made. And, as the investigator, you have a chance for the adventure, if there be one."

"Good! I'm ready."

"This is the way of it, Tom: After the death of my partner, which occurred not a long while ago, I paid no

attention to the property, being occupied with other affairs. Yesterday there came a letter from Miss Webb, for such is her name, stating that the Cericia lands, she had learned two weeks before, had been sold by her father and me, and that she was left penniless. Meanwhile, she sought information as to whether her father had retained any of the proceeds of the sale. She added that the purchaser had taken possession of the property, and now occupied the mansion at Cericia, where she and her father had resided."

"And the property was never sold?" I asked.

"Certainly not."

"Aha! Where is this Miss Webb?"

"By her letter, it seems that pseudo purchaser invited her, together with an aunt and cousin living with her as companions, to remain in the house until she could conveniently depart. Between lines I read that she was in very great distress of mind—she apparently doesn't know what to do or where to go."

"No wonder!" I exclaimed.

"I've given you my share of the property in order that you quietly may investigate the whole affair, learn who this intruder is, and, so to speak, get the lay of the ground. We shall then take prompt measures to place him behind bars. Will you go?"

"Uncle Jim, you couldn't stop me now."

CHAPTER II.

MATTER FOR A MYSTERY.

Cericia had no railroad—and, for that matter, has none now. Therefore, I alighted in due season at Hampden, the railway station nearest the hamlet—which left some thirty miles yet to be traveled—and discovered myself, about nine o'clock of a wet evening, in a small, ill-lighted, dilapidated town. The hotel was dingy, the night depressing, my spirits low, and so I retired at once. On this account, doubtless, I saw nothing until next day of the gentleman who, to speak in a certain fashion, was the beginning of my adventures.

He was just in the act of opening an egg, when a darky waiter led me to the table where he sat. I took a chair facing him; he deftly finished his egg operation, bade the waiter bring him a fresh cup of coffee, and then lifted his eyes to my person for an indolent scrutiny.

Of slender figure, rather dark of skin, and wearing a small, outstanding, pointed mustache, and carrying himself with an assured air, I guessed his age to be somewhere around forty. His eyes were full, exceedingly black, and exceedingly impudent. He sported a norfolk suit of some soft gray Scotch stuff, and a negligee white silk shirt, with a lavender cravat, in which was thrust a unicorn-headed scarfpin. A diamond of at least three carats was on the third finger of his right hand—a hand thin, brown, sinewy, refined. Altogether he appeared a passable enough Englishman, though, for my own taste, his face was somewhat narrow for solid quality. One corner of his mouth stood twitched upward as if he were always about to smile, but I judged that with him smiles lay no more than skin-deep.

The waiter shuffled forward with his coffee. I gave my order for breakfast, then cast a look out the window. The rain of the night before had ceased, the sun was shining, the sky was blue, and the day promised to be bright.

My table companion finished his egg and laid down his spoon.

"I wonder what in the devil brought you into this hole," he said, all at once. "For you've the look of large cities about you. My dear chap, you've surely not come here to remain?"

"Here, or hereabouts."

"Then you've my sympathy. Are you acquainted here?"

"Don't know a soul."

He finished his coffee. I, for my part, began to attend the breakfast which the servant placed before me. When I looked up, my companion was softly drumming the cloth.

"Perhaps I can help you, then," said he.

"Perhaps you can," I answered.

"You're a young man—I might be of service to you. I know the country here, and the people."

"Good! Tell me the road to Cericia," I said.

"Cericia!" A wrinkle appeared between his brows. "What are you going to Cericia for?"

"Well, there's a small matter I wish to look into—something private. It lies south, I suppose. Can I hire a carriage?"

"I'm not informed in regard to Cericia—there's such a place, I suppose. Why are you going there?"

"I'm interested in cabbage culture," said I. "The manager of this caravansary can give me the information I need, I presume."

"You'll not fancy the climate in this part of the world," he said, after a pause.

"Why shouldn't I?" I asked.

"My good fellow, without further chopping words, I advise you to go back, and at once."

"Go back where?" I asked.

"Where you came from. Or anywhere, except to stop in this region. I think I make myself plain."

At that I laid down my fork. His full black eyes continued to inspect my person, during the ensuing pause, with a most free impudence.

"Whoever you are, your interest in me and in my business," said I, "is wholly obnoxious—and you're interfering with my meal. Really, it looks as if you're attempting to blackmail me, or possibly to lead up to some little confidence game, or, after all, it may be merely your original method of working toward a 'touch.' But, in any case, it will do you no good; I'm not interested in you at all—in your opinions, advice, or company. Therefore, kindly go to the devil." And, taking up my knife, I began to butter a piece of biscuit.

The man rose slowly to his feet. His handsome, dark face was lit by passion, his eyes flashed rapier glances.

"You young fool, do you think you can address such words to me!" he exclaimed.

At this moment a new guest followed the waiter to the table; in fact, the man really stood by before either of us noticed him. He was a lank, melancholy person, whose rumpled hair was silvered, and whose lean face was deeply lined and sunburned. Wistful brown eyes and a wide, good-humored mouth indicated, at any rate, he would be a more peaceable companion than the Englishman. I judged him to be somewhere near fifty.

"Excuse me if I break in on a private conversation—one must eat, in spite of everything, I guess," he said, glancing at me and at my controversalist, while resting a tentative hand on his chair back.

"A happy interruption," I hastened to answer. "This gentleman's breakfast seems not to have agreed with him; he should consult a specialist for an enlarged spleen."

My still-erect gentleman with the pointed mustache chose to ignore this remark. He eyed the newcomer until he was seated.

"What are you doing here, thirty miles from your seaweed?" he demanded.

"I came over to buy quinine. I'm troubled with fever, being in the water so much," was the mild reply.

"You look it."

"I do, I suppose. Water and fever thin a man's blood. I can take quinine now almost like sugar, by the spoonful."

"That's what comes of messing round up to your knees all the while," was the Englishman's slighting response. Then he addressed himself to me: "As to our conversation, remember my words. You're young, and I've little time to waste on you."

He walked away, with something of the English cavalryman's swagger, I would have sworn; that ineradicable jaunty and egotistic motion of body that, once acquired, no mufti can hide and no habit displace. He had been an officer in some British Horse, or I would never eat another breakfast.

My new companion presently inquired if I were going to Cericia, remarking that the hotel clerk had stated I had made a statement about traveling thither. I gave him an affirmative.

"I'd like to go with you," said he. "I'm a scientist—an obscure one, to be sure—making a study of seaweed along the coast. Yesterday I walked over from Cericia, and so am rather tired out to-day—don't like to repeat the distance on foot if I can get a ride. If it wouldn't be asking too much——"

"Not at all," I said. "I'd be glad of your company. Now tell me who that chap is that just went out."

The seaweed scientist meditatively rubbed his cheek.

"He's staying at Webb House, which is at Cericia. There are several men there. He's rather insolent, isn't he?"

"That's putting it mildly."

"Well, we just have to be ourselves, I guess. You're sure you'll not be inconvenienced if I ride with you?" he asked again.

"Oh, no. You can tell me about your work on the way over."

Our conversation thereafter lagging, I became engrossed in speculation concerning the man who had just withdrawn and with whom so swiftly I had been led to a clash.

Having finished breakfast, I sought out the hotel keeper, with whom I had arranged for a conveyance to my summer resort, and learned that the vehicle would not be ready for me until after the noon meal. So, with the morning to consume, I set out to explore the village, and came, in due time, to the lower end of the street, namely, to the railway station.

Here a wagon was being loaded by perspiring negroes, who lifted heavy boxes into the wagon bed, under the direction of a strong, brown man of fifty-odd, whose chin whisker moved steadily to his tobacco chewing. He wore a faded slouch hat, with fish cord wound round its band, a collarless shirt, and boots.

This overseer eyed me suspiciously, then spat on the rails.

"Well, what d'you want here?" he asked.

"Nothing you can supply," said I.

"Then you better move on about your own business."

"Oh, I think I'll stay here a while, if that's your line."

He came a step nearer.

"You've come to watch this wagon."

"Is it worth watching? Or those boxes?"

Just then a man came forth from the depot, papers in his hand; my companion of the breakfast hour.

"You're on the job, I see, as you Yankees say," he sneered. "I suspected you would show up—well, take your fill of looking, but, mind you, go no farther." Then, to the overseer: "Pay no attention to him. Have those last boxes in and we'll start. At the proper time I'll attend to this nosey bob's mutton."

My presence, however, apparently put my slender, narrow-faced gentleman in a vile temper, for he cursed the negroes, shot evil looks my way,

and was not at all satisfied until the wagon departed.

I returned to the hotel. At the door, a cigar between his fingers, I found my melancholy scientist barring the way.

"No, you can't pass until you grant my request," he stated, a faint twinkle in his eyes. "There's a young lady in the hotel parlor very anxious to go to Cericia, and so I wish to surrender my seat in your vehicle to her."

"How, then, will you go there?"

"Why, I've still my legs, pretty long legs, at that."

"Is the lady a relation of yours?"

"I should say not—she's too good looking," he laughed. "She's very desirous of getting home. May I be frank? You've the only carriage in town that can be hired, which leaves her in a somewhat embarrassing position when it comes to conveyances. She drove over yesterday with the man who ate at your table; he sent the buggy back, it seems; then he became rather too familiar——"

"Explanation enough," I broke in. "She may have the whole carriage herself," I responded. "I'll wait until to-morrow."

"No, no, young man. There's room for you both—and you're not like the Englishman, one can tell with half an eye."

"Then we'll all go. There's room enough!" I exclaimed. "Both of you are welcome."

"Thank you. If you'll come inside, I'll make you acquainted with her. You ought to know my name, too—it's Dempster."

Into the dingy parlor of the hotel I followed him, where I beheld the girl seated near a window, chin on palm, pensively gazing out on the muddy street. She turned her face inquiringly toward us as we entered, then rose to her feet.

"This is the gentleman of whom I spoke," the scientist said, with a warm comfort in his words, "and who, I knew, would be kind enough to convey you to Cericia."

The manner which he exhibited, at once respectful, direct, and dignified, gave me a new appraisement of his character. At bottom he was a man of sterling quality. As for the girl, remaining in the shadow, she gave me a slight bow of acknowledgment in acceptance of the offer, and murmured a few words I did not catch.

"I must ask your name again," I said; "I didn't get it when Mr. Dempster introduced us. If we're to ride together, I should know it, shouldn't I? Mine is Tom Masson."

"Caroline Webb is mine," said she.

Is it surprising that I gave a start? And speech had left me. Is it surprising, too, that my heart began to pump swiftly inside my breast? One is seldom brought face to face with an unknown partner in so abrupt a fashion. Then I found, after a time, that I was staring at her most outrageously, so much so that I saw, even through the shadows, a tinge of color had crept into her cheek. But I could not help but gaze! For my partner in the Cericia project was—well, was a most extraordinarily beautiful girl.

"We start immediately after luncheon," said I, at last.

"I'll be ready," said she.

That was all for the time. It was shortly after one o'clock, therefore, that we set out for Cericia, riding in the dilapidated phaëton which was placed at my service, with an aged negro for driver. Though the ride occupied some hours, I enjoyed the fragrant woods through which our way led, the languorous air, the quaint speech of our white-headed darky, the feeling of being free in the open, and, most of all, the companionship of my scientist and the golden-haired girl beside me.

About four o'clock in the afternoon we crossed a shallow runlet, came round a growth of underbrush, and found ourselves halted in the road. A loaded wagon, tilted forward on a crushed wheel, rested in the path; the wagon was none other than the one in which I had seen the heavy packing cases being lifted that morning at the station. The weight of the load had, indeed, been the cause of the accident; the wagon was neither new nor strong. Horses and men were now gone.

This was an opportunity to see what sort of freight my Englishman transported. Bidding the darky halt, I sprang out of the phaëton. The boxes still filled the wagon. I climbed up and hoisted one of the smaller cases; it weighed fully a hundred pounds, despite its comparatively small bulk—on one of its sides were stamped the words, "Canned Peaches." I'm afraid peaches of that weight would cause serious indigestion. Stenciled above the brand, in black letters, was the address: "J. A. Corwin, Cericia, Florida." I perceived that the packing cases were of two sorts—small ones, probably a foot square, and a larger size standing on end as high as my breast. Both the scientist, who had joined me, and I examined the boxes one after another.

"You may think me curious," I said to him, when we were again seated in the carriage, "but I saw those articles being loaded on the wagon, back yonder. Besides, I was warned away from them; that would arouse any one's inquisitiveness, wouldn't it?"

"It certainly would." Dempster laughed. "But a scientist at best hasn't much curiosity outside of his own line. I'm really not interested in what anybody else wants to haul. I'm worried about my pigeons; they've had nothing to eat for twenty-four hours. They're my especial pets and hobby, you see, Mr. Masson. Every man has his weakness."

"But, Miss Webb," I asked, "aren't you wondering what's in those boxes?"

"I have more fear than curiosity," said she.

"Fear! What is there to be afraid of?" I exclaimed.

But if she knew, she remained silent. She continued to gaze aside at the wood which lined the road on either side. What, in truth, was there in those boxes to make any one apprehensive?

CHAPTER III.

MY FRIEND, THE SCIENTIST.

Late that afternoon, I detected a brininess in the air that alone belongs to the sea; too, I felt from time to time, stealing through the wood, a warm, caressing breath from over water. We neared the end of our journey; we approached the Gulf. And about sunset we emerged from among the trees; so that I beheld an extending belt of sand, beyond it an illimitable expanse of waves. Here was Cericia! Here was my promised land, my lotus-eater's abode, where it would be always afternoon!

Though from the beginning, of course, I had prepared myself to expect nothing whatever of that poetic sort, and, in fact, knew Cericia to be a commonplace village, the reality was so far worse than my shrunken expectations that my heart sank as I surveyed the miserable hamlet, composed of a dozen ramshackle, weather-beaten, drab store buildings and warehouses standing in a row afront the beach, most of them empty and boarded up, their prosperity gone, their busy day long gone—dank, rotting, abandoned.

In answer to my question where a traveler might obtain a night's lodging, Mr. Dempster informed me that Sam Brown, who had acted as overseer of the loading job at Hampton, fed and

housed the rare visitor; but, by all reports, long periods of time elapsed between demands on his hospitality, as strangers in Cericia were far between.

"Sam Brown shall not lodge me," I declared. "I'll sleep on the beach first; if necessary, under this chariot. For a person living close to a whole ocean of water, Sam Brown looks extraordinarily grimy. None of his inn for me, thank you."

Casting a glance in the opposite direction, westward, I saw what was more to my liking. Just where the wood and the broad beach joined, there reposed three small, snug bungalows, in a row some hundred yards apart, as near as I could guess; their shoulders to the trees, their faces to the sea—neat, trim little cottages, each with a veranda in front, each painted white of body, green of roof, and red of flanking fireside chimney.

Beyond this trio of delightful little dwellings, not less than a quarter of a mile, on a tongue of land projecting a short way into the water—as it were, on a diminutive cape—with a fine, thick, upstanding growth of timber at the rear, stood a broad-waisted, commodious house, white as new ivory, possessing a tall-columned portico or porch before, many ample windows in its sides, a handsome lawn in front, and an air of general well-being that brought instant cheer to the beholder.

Said Dempster: "I'll be pleased to have you as my guest until you find other quarters. One of these cottages is my present domicile, and you're welcome to share my roof and my meals."

"Good! I accept with alacrity; you're a true Samaritan," I responded. "Now we must drive Miss Webb to the large house yonder—Webb House, isn't it?"

"Yes," said he.

"Then forward to new Cericia, uncle," I commanded our driver. "We'll leave Sam Brown to eat his own fried fish."

"You mustn't drive me all the way there," the girl protested, when we arrived at the bungalow designated by Dempster as his temporary dwelling. "No, indeed. For it's but a few steps over to the house, and I can quickly walk the distance."

"I would rather have it the other way," I replied. "I don't wish you to walk."

"You've been more than kind—and please let me have my will now. See, I've already alighted."

By a quick spring she was out of the phaëton.

"I'm under a great obligation, as it is," she continued, "because you brought me home, Mr. Masson. I can only thank you now."

Needless to say, I had followed after her.

"You've deprived me of a final two minutes' happiness," I stated. "But possibly you'll save those two for some future time."

She glanced back over her shoulder, for she had already set off. "I give you permission to come to Webb House to-morrow for them," she laughed. And she departed at a quick walk.

What a straight, graceful figure she had! As I watched her move away, the sun shining on the golden hair under her hat brim, I recalled how frank and direct was her speech, how clear and earnest her blue eyes, how sincere her countenance. During the afternoon's ride she had talked little, remaining silent for the most part and leaving the conversation to Dempster and me, not so much because she appeared uncommunicative by nature as that she appeared preoccupied.

Dempster had my bags in his hands when I looked about.

"Here we are, at home," he said. "Uncle Jerry will bring in your trunk

and then feed the horses—there's a shed at the rear."

"This is certainly falling on good fortune," I answered, following him in. "You live here alone?"

"Quite—save for my family of seaweed. Jerry will be in presently. I wonder if he can cook. Most of these old plantation darkies can. He may stay forever if he can manipulate kettles and pans. As for myself, I came here to study the native sea grasses, not a particularly exciting pursuit, to be sure, but one I enjoy. So I rented this cottage to live in. Corwin, the owner, didn't seem pleased to have me mucking around, but he finally took my money. Well, I'm a negligible sort of person, at any rate; Corwin won't bother me, and it's hardly to be expected I'd bother him."

"I don't know this Corwin," said I, "and meanwhile I fancy you and I will get on famously. Let me pay my share of the household bill is all I ask; indeed, the whole of it, for that matter."

A languid wave of his hand dismissed this topic as unworthy of discussion.

"I'm sure we'll not come to blows over the expense," he rejoined. "Anyhow, we'll not argue it our first evening."

Later, during the appetizing meal which the old darky served, Dempster recounted how, during a peregrination among the cottages—that is to say, during an investigation of all three—he had come across a box of beautifully illustrated booklets describing the Cericia fruit-and-garden project, published by the late promoter. On the strength of what he read, Dempster had been persuaded to purchase five acres of woodland and go into the grapefruit business.

"You may consider me as the first settler on the famous Cerician citrus-fruit tract," he concluded.

"For my part," said I, "I'm here, at the instigation of a beloved uncle, to investigate the possibilities of cabbage culture. The cabbage deserves more honor than a cynical and degenerate public accords it."

"Very worthy, very worthy, indeed, your choice," remarked he, accepting one of my cigars and pushing aside his plate, since we had finished our meal. "Personally I prefer grapefruit."

"To change the subject," said I, "tell me something of our charming companion of the afternoon, Miss Webb."

He grew thoughtful at these words, presently to answer: "Beyond the self-evident fact that she's charming, I know nothing about her, except that she's remaining at Webb House with an aunt and cousin, all guests of Corwin, who, it appears, bought this Cericia property from her father. Whether or not she's a relative of Corwin, I don't know; possibly she is, since she continues here. As I've said, I've been in Cericia only a short time myself—ten days, in fact. Miss Webb and I struck up a casual acquaintance one afternoon, while I was wading along the shore, on the lookout for what I could find. But our talk has been of the most ordinary topics, always impersonal."

"What sort is this fellow Corwin?"

"Very much a man, physically and mentally, too, is my guess."

"And this Englishman who sat at my table during breakfast?"

"One of Corwin's guests." Dempster stretched forth his legs and sighed. "A very queer house party it is, made up of nice, gentle people on the one hand and of the devil's own on the other. Ratchford is the name of the man you had your conversational tilt with; there's another fellow with him, English, also, by the name of Malmesbury—both of them reckless adventurers, by their air."

"This place looks hardly the spot

for adventurers to prosper," I remarked.

"Looks are often deceptive. On the contrary, Masson, it's in just such quiet, sleepy, lifeless places that those fellows can best work. However, it's all pure guessing as regards them. They may be the honestest men in the world."

"I believe I'll saunter over and have a look at Webb House," said I. "Will you come along?"

He would, and did, going bareheaded as he was. We descended the beach, then turned westward, where shone the last faint glow of evening.

By the time we came even with the house, its windows were bright with lamps against the early darkness. It was a splendid mansion of the colonial style, beautifully situated and remaining apart, if not aloof, from the old village.

We continued along the beach, where speedily we came upon a small pier extending into the water, apparently to permit the wharfing of vessels of shallow draft.

"It hasn't been used since I've been here," Dempster stated. "Hello. What's this?"

He had stumbled over something resting on the sand, a few yards from the pier. He reached down and felt it with a hand, then finally struck a match. The small flare disclosed a cracker box half full of provisions—two or three cans of tomatoes, a strip of bacon, paper bags tied and full, a string of onions, a small canister of tobacco, and a roll of newspapers. Beside the box stood a small water keg.

"Somebody's pantry," said I.

"So it appears. Apparently the 'somebody' is going forth upon the water."

"The tide will carry away the stuff before morning."

"The tide won't get it, I imagine. Whoever it's intended for will be here first. Shall we walk on?"

For a mile we advanced along the sands, then swung about, to return. On our homeward walk the lighted house stood forth like a beacon upon the edge of the sea. The night was now quite dark. But overhead, in the sky, shone a myriad of stars, whose gleams produced that faint glimmer which is neither light nor darkness but a subtle effect born seemingly of something physically different. By our side, where water and beach met, ran always the vague and phosphorescent lace of foam, advancing, retreating, shifting, vanishing, to a ceaseless, tireless accompaniment of swishing sound.

"Listen!" my companion all at once exclaimed, lifting a hand. His dim form remained as if fixed while he listened. "Oars," said he, at last.

We had come again near to the pier. We quickened our steps, until we came among its piling.

"Now, have a care to be quiet. We'll soon learn what we learn," he remarked cheerfully, in my ear. "And I'll bet one of your cabbages this food was not put here on behalf of any gospel missionary."

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE BEACH.

Among the piles that supported the platform of the small pier the gloom was intense. My companion gripped my arm and guided me forward to a place which met his satisfaction.

"Here come some persons from the opposite direction," he whispered. "We're well shielded, however, from any number of visitors. Let them come."

Sure enough, from toward the house sounded the voices of two approaching men who spoke in careless, unguarded tones.

"Well, the delay doesn't matter,"

said one. "Moreles should be along now."

"He's close at hand. I saw him strike a match out on the water, there, to light his cigarette by—the fool! A dozen times at least I've told him not to make lights when meeting us here; but a Spaniard will have a cigarette if he die next minute for it."

The latter speaker was the man with whom I had had my exchange of compliments over the breakfast table, the Englishman Ratchford. What the devil was he up to now!

A moment later the pair halted a short way off, remaining silent, as if gazing off to sea to determine the whereabouts of the approaching boatman. If so, they were not long left in doubt. Above the subdued sound of water along the beach came the regular creak of oars, then a slithering rush when the rower shot his boat up the sands, tossed his oars inside, and himself out, ready to drag the craft high upon the next upshooting wave.

It was wet work even with the water as quiet as it was. The night voyager must have been soaked to the thighs before he finally succeeded in his task, but doubtless minded it little, as the Gulf currents are warm. In answer to a low, signaling whistle by one of the pair awaiting him, he presently advanced while uttering a response.

"I'm arrived, señores," he stated.

"We saw you before you arrived, thanks to your matches," my morning acquaintance returned. "Some night you'll bring down a sneaking eavesdropper, who'll learn of our affairs and betray what he learns—sell us out."

"One must smoke. Besides, who, in this fish village, knows or cares what we do, señores?"

"Cover the flame, just the same. No one must mark your comings and goings. There are outsiders here now, and we don't want them inquiring into what does not concern them."

"I agree with you, señor. Yet one must smoke." And shielding a match with his palms, he held it to a fresh cigarette.

By the yellow light reflected in his cupped hands, we two unsuspected watchers saw his face; the swarthy, bearded face of a Latin, with shining eyeballs, appearing for an instant like a bold portrait study strikingly limned in gold and black.

"Now your information, señores. Am I to expect a night's work, as planned?" he inquired presently.

"Not to-night, Moreles. We had a breakdown of our basket on the way here, and that particular load of stuff won't arrive until to-morrow. Count, then, on moving it to-morrow night, at the usual hour. How are the boxes you have taken?"

"Carefully concealed, Señor Ratchford."

"That's well. Here's food and water. If anything should interfere to prevent carrying out our arrangement to-morrow night, we'll manage to dispatch a messenger to you by four o'clock in the afternoon in order to save you the night's useless waiting."

"A hundred thanks, señor. Now, if there's nothing more to be communicated to me, I'll make my excuses, and depart."

"There's nothing more."

A trip by the Spaniard to the boat with the box of provisions, repeated with the water keg, a *"Buenas noches,"* softly called, the sound of his craft sliding off the sand and being tossed upon the surge of a comber, a splash, then almost immediately the hearers caught once more the creaking noise of oars. The boatman was steadily pulling away.

"Well, let's go back to the house," said the second of the pair, who had remained silent during the interview. "I'm thirsty."

"Run along, then; I'm for a walk."

"So? I'll accompany you."

"You'll do nothing of the kind."

The other, who, judging by his voice, was a young fellow, began to laugh.

"Off to see that fisher girl, I wager. Wouldn't mind making a hit there myself, Ratchford. She's a beauty in her way. Dark, bright-eyed, shapely, and hot-blooded. Think I'll try to cut you out, by Jove! I really must, for the glory of the game."

"And I think you'll not, Malmesbury."

Again the youth laughed. "Pretty tale for the ladies of the house if word of this flirtation came to their ears. I can imagine Miss Webb giving you a bally cold shoulder when she learns it."

"Mind you don't carry the word. You know something of me and my ways and that no man crosses me without suffering for it. And mind you this, too. I'll not have you so attentive to Miss Webb as you have been."

"Well, that's another matter. I'll use my own discretion in regard to her, you may be sure."

For a moment a tense silence ensued. Then the elder commanded harshly: "You'll be polite to her, but no more. You'll try no love-making, or you'll have a settlement with me. That's the word for you. I'll be obeyed, if I have to resurrect my sword from out my trunk to drill you in orders like a recruity!"

"Eh? When I take orders from you, I'll let you know by written letter," the younger returned, all at once losing his pleasant tones and growing hard. "I've allowed you to order me about a bit at times because it suited my book, Ratchford, but when it no longer suits it, then you may as well save your breath."

"I'll be obeyed if I kill you to have the obedience, mind my words!" Ratchford exclaimed. "And we'll have no more argument about it. Now go back to your smoky Scotch whisky."

Without waiting for a reply, the speaker marched off, swallowed up by the night, the sound of his footfalls swiftly ceasing on the sands. His erstwhile companion remained quite still. About us beat the steady but subdued roll of the surf, echoing hollowly under the damp roof formed by the pier over our heads.

At last Ratchford's unseen companion broke out in a sneer.

"Be obeyed!" he said aloud. "Talking as if he were still an officer and hadn't been cashiered. Two can play at your game, old top."

Next moment he, too, was gone, no doubt to wet his thirst as suggested and confirm his assertion.

CHAPTER V.

I BECOME A GUEST AT THE WEBB HOUSE.

During breakfast, next morning, I learned several bits of news concerning Cericia that were both entertaining and informative. Our old negro servant, while questing about the hamlet at daybreak for cream, butter, and eggs to supply our larder, had gathered his budget of tales with the rest, having that acquisitive propensity common to gossips; and he garrulously shared, upon a provocative question of Dempster's, what he had heard. There was the affair of Sam Brown's daughter, this brunet belle having jilted Lafe Dodds, a youthful swain, when he forbade her having so much to do with the fine gentlemen of Webb House. Dodds was gnawing his fingers with jealousy, it appeared. Then there was the back-door servants' talk at Webb House itself, which declared that Mrs. Belknap and Olive Belknap, respectively Caroline's aunt and cousin, were infatuated with the gallant guests whom Mr. Corwin entertained; indeed, were quite foolish over them, while

Caroline Webb alone remained indifferent to their advances.

Well, Dempster and I were not seeking this sort of kitchen gossip, but when the old negro once was started, he seemed to find so rich an enjoyment in his narrative, as indicated by his frequent chuckles, that neither of us had the heart to halt him.

After breakfast, Dempster went off to pursue his search for seaweed, I declining his invitation to accompany him. I desired an uninterrupted hour for reflection, in order to decide upon some course of action against the men who held Webb House. It would not be an easy matter to oust them. It would not be an easy matter to force an immediate action. Corwin, in securing the coöperation of Sam Brown, the principal man in the place, and, as I guessed, more or less of a scoundrel, had intrenched himself so that at least local favor would be his. Ignorant and suspicious of strangers as the natives naturally were, Brown could, if necessary, easily stir them up against me. Caution on my part was essential. Still, on the other hand, a definite lead forces one's opponents in their turn to expose a card, and I determined to venture into the enemies' camp.

The sun was shining brightly on Webb House when, about eleven o'clock, I sallied up to the door. It was as I paused to have a last look round and to take a deep breath before sounding the knocker that I perceived, a long way up the beach, two girls' figures. Caroline Webb and her cousin, Olive Belknap, were out for a stroll. Caroline was a much more desirable person to see than one or several disagreeable, not to say suspicious, men. I decided to reflect further upon the situation, so seated myself in a comfortable wicker chair, in the shade of the portico, and some distance from the door.

I sat close by an open window. For this reason I became unpremeditatedly a listener to part of a conversation being conducted within the room from which the window opened. The speakers were invisible to me, as I to them. By the voices they were three. One I recognized as Ratchford's, one Malmesbury's, and the other I surmised to be Corwin's.

"Four nights from to-night will be the time," said he whom I guessed to be Corwin. "At least, that will be near enough to count on."

"Hope so," Malmesbury remarked. "Devil knows we've been slow at it. The job should have been ready by now."

"Oh, jib that talk. What's a day more or less?" Ratchford exclaimed. "The main thing, Corwin, is to have this man of yours appear at the proper moment. Once we've things in shape, then is when we mustn't be hung up because of his bally loafing."

"He's a man with a name for promptness. I think you need do no worrying on his score."

"Very good. But remember the stake's large."

"No one carries that in mind more than I, so let that rest. I go to New Orleans within the hour, to close up matters and put everything in order for the final move," Corwin said, in his rich, powerful, and resonant voice. "I'll be absent three or four days, returning by the fourth evening at the latest, the time we depart. As for this fellow you tell me about coming here yesterday, Ratchford, keep an eye on him and ascertain his business. If it be espionage, use the measures we discussed. We want no inquisitive busybodies arriving at this stage in the proceedings. I set out for Hampden almost immediately."

The other two men made some answer, and soon betook themselves from the room. Corwin remained engaged

with his affairs, I judged, and, because there appeared nothing more to be learned by the window, I quietly carried my chair farther away, to a new position, where I might observe more clearly the two girls who now strolled along the beach toward Webb House. It was a little afterward I apprehended, by that uncanny sense which enables one to see without eyes, that some one stood looking at my back from the open window.

My first instinct was to face about. On second thought, I rose to my feet, scanned the sea, began to pace the veranda, and finally let my look rove round and come, as if quite by accident, to the casement. Just within the embrasure stood a man, fifty-odd, tall and corpulent, and large of head. His thick, coarse black hair was shot with silver, his close-clipped, wiry mustache and bushy brows were gray; but one was struck most by his penetrating eyes, large, predatory nose, and heavy, square chin. All his features, his figure, and, indeed, the very spirit of the man, bespoke solidity, mass, power. His lips were close shut in a manner that appeared rather the result of long habit and studied repression of strong passions than because of some immediate feeling.

"Remain where you are," he said, stretching his hand toward me in a sovereign gesture. "I'll join you outside at once." And he disappeared from the window.

I collected myself to meet the interrogation which now was inevitable. In the calculating look which he had bent on me, I read a dozen questions a-move in his mind—how long had I sat there? Had I overheard any of the previous talks? What did I know of his plans?—suspicions he must on the minute verify or allay. And presently he strode forth through the door giving upon the portico and advanced to the spot where I stood.

"My name is Corwin. Are you here to see me?" he asked, halting.

"To see Miss Webb," I answered.

"On business? For the time being I'm managing her affairs," he continued smoothly. "Therefore, if you've matters of a business nature to discuss, I'll listen to you. Proceed, if you please."

"Thank you, but I have no business. My call is purely a social one. Yesterday I was lucky enough to be able to give Miss Webb a seat in my carriage here from Hampden, and, in return, she was kind in asking me to run over for a chat. So here I am, you see."

"You didn't ring when you came," said he.

"Oh, no, that would have been of no use. I saw Miss Webb and another young lady—there they are, yonder!—walking on the beach, and so decided it not worth while to announce myself."

"How long have you sat here?"

"I can't say exactly—a very few minutes."

"That tells me nothing. Did you overhear a conversation being carried on in that room?" And he pointed at the window.

"What conversation?" I inquired.

"Any conversation—there's no need to specify."

I resumed my chair. His overbearing manner ruffled me—I brought out my cigar case and prepared to smoke.

"You've not given me an answer," said he.

"Why should I? I never answer offensive remarks." Then assuming a righteous manner, I inquired: "Are you the butler of this dwelling?"

"I'm not the butler," he replied.

"Well, whoever you are, I refuse to allow you to insult me. I came to pay my respects to Miss Webb, not to be interrogated."

His firm, grim lips slowly shaped themselves in a smile.

"I beg your pardon, Mr.——"

"Masson," I supplied.

"Mr. Masson, thank you. You'll pardon me, I'm sure, as I'm naturally zealous where Miss Webb's interests are concerned. I am very fond of her. Rest assured, I have no desire to insult you or any one who may come to Webb House—never without reason." A faint emphasis lay on his speech. "Miss Webb's friends are as welcome here as my own. I mentioned that I look after her affairs because I presumed your errand was a business one."

I sat forward in my chair, pretending a new interest.

"It's business, too, by Jove, that brought me!" I exclaimed. "I came to Cericia because I heard somewhere that this is the ideal spot for raising oranges and cabbages and the like. I'm going in for them, you know. Some chaps go in for polo and some go in for ranching, but I'm going to make my line cabbages—royal cabbages for the New York market. It ought to go, hadn't it, for salads and that sort of thing?"

"Ah, I see that your business, after all, is with me," he replied, with a quizzical smile. "For I own these lands."

I gazed at him as blankly as I was able.

"So then it's with you," I said. "You must tell me everything there is to know about cabbages—you know all about them, don't you?"

"Not quite all," was his answer.

"Then what do you know? I'm a duffer just starting in the cabbage enterprise, and have lots to learn—heaps, I suppose. But, I say, I can make my call on Miss Webb, too, can't I?"

"If she's willing, certainly."

"She appears a most charming young lady," I responded.

"And she's as charming as she appears," he said. Then, glancing at his watch: "I'm leaving for a few days and so shall be unable to talk over with you your prospective purchase of cabbage land until I return. Where are you stopping—Brown's?"

"Oh, no. Mr. Dempster kindly put me up last night—I can do very well there, I imagine, until you return."

"I won't listen to that. You must come over to Webb House—no, don't protest. I'll have it no other way. You shall be my guest—or shall I say Miss Webb's?—until you've made your purchase of land. Rest assured, while you're here you'll be well looked after."

Something in his tone, something sounding like iron under silk, caused me to hesitate in accepting his invitation. Was it this man who was being hoodwinked—or was it I?

"You'll come, will you not?" he continued, more agreeably. "To quiet your scruples, we'll consider you solely as Miss Webb's guest. That should prevail with you."

"Indeed it does, thank you," I answered. "And possibly you've some books in the house on cabbage culture—I'll read them while you're away."

CHAPTER VI.

A NEW CAUSE OF TROUBLE.

Corwin, with a word of apology that he must snatch a bite and be off to Hampden, went into the house, leaving me to meditate upon our meeting. I had made a step forward; I was to become an inmate of the mansion.

A tall young fellow of about my own age sauntered forth upon the veranda, presently discovered my presence, and stalked toward me.

"I say, old top, are you the bogy that Ratch has scared us to death with since he came back from Hampden?" he inquired, in throaty British. "I heard Corwin say just now you were to stop here—and Ratchford is to keep an eye on you, you know."

A grin rested on his long face. For long face it surely was, like those in old English prints—high cheek bones, wide, blue eyes, a long, hanging nose, and a loose mouth, long as a finger, that disclosed long, horselike teeth. His teeth I marked particularly; they carried to the observer instant conviction that, whatever else he might or might not be able to do, if he wished, he could bite with tremendous power. In addition to these details of his appearance, he had straw-colored hair, parted in the middle, and the milk-and-rose complexion common to many Englishmen.

I removed my cigar from my lips and spoke accusingly:

"Your name is Malmesbury, and you drink Scotch whisky—I can tell it by the enormous plaid pattern of your clothes."

The fellow went off into a fit of laughter.

"Really, old chap," he said, when he had his breath, "I fancy you're not bad company at all. The fact Ratchford blackened your character predisposes me in your favor. By Jove, your cigar smells good—I'll trade you a drink of that same Scotch for one."

"You're welcome to a cigar, without the Scotch," I said, handing him my case.

He selected a weed, and lighted it.

"Now tell me what you're doing in this damnable hole," said he, spreading his legs and lifting his chin.

"I expect to go into the cabbage business," I informed him.

"Cabbage business! Oh, I say, that's too strong."

"Nevertheless, cabbages. Now, Mr. Malmesbury, declare, in your turn, what you're doing here in this, as you put it, disagreeable quarter."

He leaned back against the neighboring porch pillar, bit off the end of his cigar as easily as a child bites through a sugar peppermint, and gazed down his nose solemnly.

"I'm a metal worker." He let his look come slantwise up to meet mine.

"Ah!" said I.

"Yes, dear chap, a metal worker," he went on, "and a metal mover. Does that satisfy you?"

"I was not aware there was a foundry hereabouts," I remarked.

"Well, there is—of sorts."

"I'll not keep you longer from your labors," I said. "It's time for me to be going."

"Adieu, then, friend of the good cigars," he responded, with an indolent gesture of farewell.

I descended the grassy slope before the house. Caroline Webb and her cousin were still walking some way off, but, as I should meet the former later on, I decided to wait no longer now.

Dempster was ready for luncheon when I arrived at his cottage. During the meal, I informed him of my prospective sojourn in Webb House, explaining the circumstances of the invitation I had received and afterward voicing the suspicion I held that Caroline Webb needed protection.

"See here," said I, looking him in the eyes. "Do you mind if I speak confidentially?"

"Any confidence you give me will be respected and prized," he answered.

"Well, this is what I want to say—it has to do with Cericia, Corwin, Miss Webb, and myself." And thereupon I proceeded to relate the history of the estate and inform him of the facts of my unusual partnership with Caroline Webb. From time to time he nodded his understanding of the account. When I came to the circumstance of Corwin's fraudulent mortgaging of the property, property in which the man had not the faintest shadow of title, Dempster thrust out his head in sudden interest.

"So that's the way of it!" he exclaimed. "You're wise in going over yonder; things couldn't have turned out

better for her and for you. Now, as to the business end of the affair, if I may make a suggestion, you should take immediate steps to enlist the law in your behalf and have your title corrected."

"A letter goes to my uncle to-day," I replied. "That's the first thing. When I hear from him in regard to the matter, I'll arrange for Corwin's arrest. Uncle Jim wanted me to investigate the state of affairs here before taking any action."

After our meal, I wrote my uncle, telling what I had learned of the condition of things in Cericia. This done, I took a breath of relief. Dempster informed me that the post office of the community was in Brown's store, so thither, about three o'clock that afternoon, the scientist and I walked.

Last, that is to say, farthest east of the row of dingy frame buildings facing the beach, most being empty and with windows boarded up, Brown's store fronted the sea with a dejected look. A lean-to had been built on the open side, connected with the main room by a door cut through the wall, where, over a rude bar, liquor was dispensed to the thirsty of Cericia. The store itself exhibited but a meager stock of merchandise, having the same dingy and aged appearance that marked the structure itself: Cheap clothing, stained bolts of calico, pairs of unwieldy boots, boxes of provisions, barrels of sugar, of molasses, flour, rice, and the like—all contributing an ingrained smell, strongly saturated by the odor of whisky from the adjacent lean-to. At the rear of the room one corner had been railed off and framed to serve as the post office.

This much I gained when we first entered. In the middle of the storeroom, a young fellow, with hat a-tilt, was talking angrily to a girl who stood behind a counter. She leaned back, with shoulders resting against a shelf that held rolls of cloth. Her arms were folded, her lips were a little contemptuous. She had a strong, lithe figure, now in repose, her skin was of a rich olive, which I imagined would answer quickly to her blood when her feelings were aroused, and a full black eye, that immediately swept Dempter and me when we stepped inside the building. Instantly I knew that she was Sam Brown's daughter, a girl of perhaps twenty-two or three, of considerable natural intelligence and fervid impulses, the one over whom Ratchford and Malmesbury had squabbled the previous night on the beach.

The young fellow who was talking had been at Brown's bar, that was at once apparent both in his manner and in his utterance.

"You think you can run with those fine folks at Webb House," he exclaimed, without noticing Dempster and me, "and me never say a word. I tell you, Sally, you got to quit 'em if you expect to marry me."

A wave of color rose under the girl's cheeks.

"You're drunk, Lafe; go home till you're sober," she said.

"I'm not going home," he mouthed.

"Well, I'm tired of your talking this way. Once for all, I tell you I won't marry you; make up your mind to that. You're a fool—and I'll never marry a fool."

"Those men at Webb House, with their soft talk, have given you these airs!" he cried. "They think no one knows what they're up to, and——"

"Leave the store at once, or I'll call father!" she commanded. "I won't have such a nuisance around, and I won't have you talking this way with people in the store."

"People!" The youth looked about until his eyes lighted on us. "Some more of the fine folks from outside of Cericia. I'm sick of 'em all." He took a swaggering step or two toward

Dempster and me. "You're another pair Corwin's got here to help him in his dirty fishing, ain't you? Think you're fooling everybody with what you're doing in these parts, but there's one you ain't fooling, and that's Lafe Dodds. You come in here and get Sam Brown mixed up in your business; you come in here and make love to Sam's daughter, who's going to marry me, hoodwinking her, filling her full of notions till her head's turned. Cericia maybe don't know what you're doing, but here's one who knows. Put that in your tobacco; you're not fooling me."

As he made his accusations, his words grew more and more vehement, rose higher and higher, until they reached a shrill pitch. All at once I perceived framed in the door leading into the lean-to the brown, bearded face of the man I had seen the night before on the beach, lighted by the match flame; of the unknown from the sea who had landed by the pier and who later put out again upon the starlit water. I saw now that he was a Mexican. He stared fixedly at the intoxicated youth, finally swept Dempster and me with his glance, and withdrew.

The girl came round to the front of the counter. Her lips were compressed, her brows knit in a dark, angry look.

"Leave this store!" she commanded Lafe Dodds.

"I'll leave when I'm ready!" he retorted, though, nevertheless, moving toward the entrance.

"And, once you're out, stay out!" She followed him up, pressing him on. "Never come in here again; never set foot in this room a single time. Don't stand mooning there and letting all the flies in. I treated you like a gentleman—but you ain't one; you're just white trash. So move along."

Dodds muttered an obstinate oath, whereupon the girl gave him a final push that carried him out through the door. She then came back to us, lips still compressed, bosom quickly rising and falling quite as if a stormy sea were in it. But when she spoke, her voice was once more even and business-like.

"Do you men want something?" she asked.

"I wish to post these letters," I replied, presenting my epistles.

"Very well," she answered. "The letters will go over to Hampden tomorrow—the mail is sent three times a week."

"And reaches here a corresponding number of times, I suppose?"

"Yes. The sack is carried there in the morning and back in the afternoon every other day."

The place itself did not invite a person to loiter, so we set out for home. In front of one of the ramshackle, boarded-up warehouses, Lafe Dodds was holding forth in a loud voice to an audience comprising two white men and five negroes, all of whom sat sunning themselves against the building. Anger and liquor both were working strongly in the young fellow, so that when we came even with the group, he swung out to bar our way.

"You're two more of the fine birds come here to Cericia," he snarled, "and you'll be making love to Sally Brown, like the others. For a cent, I'd lick you both.

"Stand back nothing! You think because she put me out of the store you can talk up—I'll show you!"

"You're doing the talking. If you wish to stand here, we'll go round."

Argument with a drunken man is always futile, so, allowing him possession of the spot, I started to go about him.

"No, you don't, you shrimp!" he shouted, grabbing my coat lapel.

He began to laugh, shoving his flushed face near mine. In disgust, I jerked my coat free. Instantly his laugh ceased and he struck me a blow

on the breast. Now, I don't mind a bout with a friend with gloves, and in a friendly spirit, but ordinary brawling goes against the grain, for nothing that I can imagine is more calculated to decrease one's self-respect. I had no intention of becoming involved in one here any more than I should at home. So I stepped back a pace from the drunken loafer, and a second time started to go round him.

"Look at the coward trying to sneak off!" Dodds jeered. And, as if he thought me about to take to my heels, he lunged forward anew, swinging his fist.

Well, there was but one thing to do —and I did it with expedition and neatness. I may be averse to a brawl, but I'm not a peace-at-any-price man. Waiting no longer, I side-stepped Dodds' blow and shot a punch to his jaw that straightened him in his tracks, followed it with a rap over his heart that concluded the encounter, and left him spread-eagled on the sand.

"Very scientifically executed," said Dempster. "Shall we proceed or shall we wait till he comes to his senses?"

"Better wait, I suppose," said I. "I didn't exactly mean to put out his light, but matters were pressing."

After a moment, Dodds opened his eyes, finally got up on an elbow, then at last hoisted himself to his feet. He was a pretty sick Cerician, yet the fighting spirit had not been wholly quenched in his breast.

Beginning with a string of oaths, he said: "I'll make you pay for this; you see if I don't make you pay for this."

"If you've any sense, you'll drop the matter here and now," I returned.

"I'll have my turn," he answered sullenly. "I'm going to take pay for this out of your hide, that's what I am."

"All right. I've said my last word," I said, starting on.

Even in words he was determined to have the last one.

"And you keep away from Sally Brown, d'you hear!" he shouted after me, a warning Dempster repeated with a chuckle.

Dodds and Sally Brown were both promptly forgotten in the anticipation of my sojourn at Webb House. I planned to go there that afternoon, shortly before dinner time. This project was carried out, and it was just as the silver-toned grandfather's clock in the hall was striking the hour of six that, preceded by Uncle Jerry, who carried my bags, I entered the house. A negro boy relieved the old darky of the luggage and led me up the stair to the room which, he stated, Mr. Corwin had ordered placed at my disposal.

Some twenty minutes later, I went down again. Entering the living room, I beheld Caroline Webb seated by a window. She quickly rose when she saw me, and came forward.

"I've been waiting for you to come down," she said hurriedly. "May I have a moment alone with you?"

"Assuredly, Miss Webb."

"What I wish to speak of is this: Mr. Corwin announced you were coming here to stay. That does not matter—but he said you were coming on my account, as my friend——"

Here I interjected: "If you'll allow me to be a friend."

"But we're only acquaintances, if that. I never saw you until yesterday; I never asked you to come here. This is Mr. Corwin's house, and I'm merely a guest in it. You've no right to come here sailing under false colors, to come on his invitation, while pretending it is on mine."

"But I do not come under false colors—I really wish to be your friend."

"I have no friends," she said, a trace of bitterness escaping her; "least of all are Mr. Corwin's mine. You're another of the men he's brought here, I learn

now. Yesterday I thought differently, but I find you're but one of the rest."

"Should the fact that Mr. Corwin consented to admit me make it impossible for us to be friends?" I asked.

For a little she remained perplexed by this question, then her lips set firmly.

"It does, yes." And she began to move away.

"One minute. Be so good as to let me explain," I said.

"Explanations often do not explain," she answered, pausing. "You must excuse me." With that she was gone.

I stood where I was, not attempting to follow. Unquestionably I showed in a black color; she imagined me an ally, if not something less respectable, of Corwin's, and what such an alliance meant she doubtless knew better than I. Well, I should go ahead with the wind, until I could show my true flag. Presently I went where she had led, coming into the next room, where I found myself in the midst of the assembled house guests.

Now, as I remained where I had halted, a bit surprised at their unexpected presence, a bit conscious of intrusion as a stranger among them, Caroline Webb exhibited her natural kindness and generosity of heart. She supposed me one of Corwin's hirelings, yet was aware that I was, nevertheless, unacquainted with the others here; and though, with propriety, she might have kept in her place, on seeing my hesitation, she came forward and graciously made me known to her aunt, Mrs. Belknap, to her Cousin Olive, and afterward to the two Englishmen, the last introduction being really superfluous.

When I thanked her in an aside, she said: "I'm not ungrateful for your assistance yesterday afternoon. It is a small return for that."

Mrs. Belknap was one of those indolent but assertive women who sit most of the day in a comfortable chair, doing nothing, but who the more on that account expect very much to be done for them. She was large, fleshy, bloodless, and, as I saw by a first glance at her physiognomy, cold of eye and calculating of mind—a woman who would be content so long as her wants were supplied, her hours amused, her commands served, and her will uncrossed. She was a devotee of solitaire; indeed, had a pack of cards in her hand at that moment. Her one weakness was her daughter Olive. Whatever Olive did was right. Whatever Olive demanded, Olive must have. Whomever Olive admired, she likewise admired; when Olive smiled, then smiled her mother. These facts I, of course, only sensed at the minute, but they later were confirmed. In my own particular case Olive, I judged, had been beforehand with her in some opinion or other of me that Ratchford had inspired, for Mrs. Belknap, with Olive at her chair arm, had greeted me with spare words and a hostile gaze.

"You're stopping in Cericia," she presently addressed me, not asking a question but stating a fact.

"Oh, yes, here, in Webb House," I replied.

"Mr. Corwin said nothing until this noon of your coming."

"Mr. Corwin is careful to keep his own counsel, I imagine," said I, "until he's ready to speak it." Then, after supporting a freezing look from her, I cheerfully went on: "He may not have informed you, but I'm not here as his guest at all, you know."

"As whose, then, pray?"

"Miss Webb's, please know."

"Caroline's? Indeed! But this is Mr. Corwin's house."

"Mr. Corwin is perfectly informed of the circumstances," I remarked. "He understands, if you do not."

"Indeed!" Mrs. Belknap repeated.

"Yes, exactly," said I. "Moreover, I'm sure I'm going to like it here."

Then the two of us eyed each other a while.

"You're an impudent intruder, and Caroline is a fool," she burst forth. "And I'm sure Mr. Corwin acted without giving the matter proper thought. He's left the direction of affairs here at Webb House in my hands until his return. He probably imagined you wished to come to dinner once with Caroline, no more. Caroline can introduce no one, especially a person of whom she knows nothing, into our midst. Mr. Corwin, on second thought, would agree with me. My niece ought to be locked up in her room for punishment for this silly business."

Caroline Webb flushed under the woman's brutal words, slowly turned her shoulder to the room, and looked out of a near-by window.

"Then I should have to help her out of her predicament," I said pleasantly.

"You're quite capable of attempting anything like that, to judge from what I've seen of you."

"That's the most pleasing compliment I've received in years—it would be worth much to serve Miss Webb." From the latter came a quick, grateful look, then she was once more gazing out the window.

"Do you intend to act so insufferably as to remain where you're not welcome?" the aunt demanded coldly.

"Madam, your words are neither pleasant nor just. However, I fancy you'll find me safely seated at the dinner table this evening with the rest of you."

"Mr. Ratchford—Mr. Malmesbury, do you mean to tolerate such insolence?" she demanded of the Englishmen.

"Oh, Corwin knows he's staying on," the former answered, with indifference. Malmesbury favored me with a wink and a grin.

Quite as I had stated, I sat at dinner that evening with the other members of the household. Mrs. Belknap ignored me, her daughter was furtively observant, Caroline Webb was civil and somewhat silent. Ratchford did not attempt any particular impoliteness toward me. Apparently he would watch and wait and learn what my advent upon the scene portended. He would not disclose his hand before he had discovered mine. Too, he may have concluded, better an enemy under surveillance than one hidden from view. Well, that dinner could not be called a love feast in any sense of the word, but it did not lack spirit.

Said Malmesbury, with laughing mockery:

"I can't blame you, Mr. Cabbage Raiser, for hunting out a civilized dwelling in which to dine. Knowing the limitations of Cericia, I should have done the same—and, my dear fellow, you could be a very bad lot and still be a better table companion than old Corwin. He's gone, you're come—I'd welcome the devil himself for a diversion. Even Ratchford, here, becomes a terrible bore at times, you know."

"And at times you're worse than a bore," Olive Belknap exclaimed, with a flash of her eyes at the offender; "you're a nuisance."

"Hush, Olive, hush!" her mother interposed, but with no great ardor, while giving Ratchford a sympathetic look.

Malmesbury grinned at me over his plate.

"You see how the wind blows there, Masson," he said. "Poor, innocent child, she doesn't know Ratchy and his horrible past. I say, if she'd wanted an honest, uncorrupted man on whom to bestow her young affections, she ought to have chosen me—speaking modestly, y'know—and not yonder stone."

"You brute!" Olive cried.

"Malmesbury, you're half drunk again," Ratchford declared. "Stop that sort of talk."

The other rolled his eyes upward.

"Virtuous, virtuous Ratchy!" Then addressing me: "Very edifying, isn't it? This is about the bally run of our dinner talk, old chap. We quarrel, we fight, we kiss and make up, we growl and scowl, and whimper and simper, ye gods! I except Miss Caroline—she's the statue on a pedestal of us all. Too good to be dining with riffraff like Ratchy and me, who've——"

Ratchford crashed his hand upon the table and sprang to his feet, his thin, dark face alight with passion.

"Stop it, you fool! Let your tongue run loose any farther, and I'll put you where you'll cease to talk at all!"

Malmesbury pretended a mock terror. And having, no doubt, achieved his end of arousing the greater number of the dinner company to distress and rage, he ceased his slashing gibes and proceeded to eat with great gusto, with only now and again a sharp innuendo. Caroline Webb alone of all he respected; toward her alone deferred with a gentlemanly manner that bespoke early breeding.

As for Caroline Webb herself, sensitive, high-bred, gentle-minded, can one imagine for her anything more unpleasant, more sordid, than this company and these scenes here in the house of her dead father, her former home? Her aunt, wife of her father's brother, and, therefore, no blood relation, and her Cousin Olive were of a coarser strain, less quick to insult and ignominy. It must have seared Caroline's very soul. What harassment of mind, what suffering of spirit, she had endured under this roof since the coming of these adventurers, she alone knew—and I could but guess it from her tense, white face and from a courageous but trembling smile which, late in the meal, she directed toward me.

Well, all things have an end. In time this dinner, too, came to its conclusion.

CHAPTER VII.

ON A NEW FOOTING.

A change of weather occurred that evening. About sunset there rolled in from the sea a bank of gray fog; darkness immediately shut down, a fine moisture penetrated the house, and the boom of the surf upon the beach was subdued to a muffled, less dominant, tone. Servants placed lights in the living room, where, upon the close of dinner, our party betook itself. As if the mist that blanketed land and sea oppressed the spirits of all, there was little of conversation and less of companionship. Malmesbury wandered away somewhere, probably for his eternal glass of Scotch; Ratchford spent the time standing before the open door, gazing out into the night; Mrs. Belknap took up some embroidery; Olive, whose attention naturally sought its keenest interest, regarded Ratchford in thoughtful silence; and Caroline buried herself in a book.

Suddenly Ratchford swung about and crossed the room to summon a servant.

"Have Mr. Malmesbury come here, then bring our hats!" he ordered.

After a deliberate period of time, the other Englishman sauntered into the room. A cigar was uptilted between his teeth, his hands were in his pockets, his air was bored.

"What's the row, old chap?" he inquired.

"No row. I want you, that is all." And Ratchford drew him apart, where the pair conferred together in low tones. Later, they took their hats from the servant, and, with a careless apology, went out of the house.

I was tempted to follow, for, without question, they were bound on the mysterious business that occupied them here in Cericia, availing themselves of the cover afforded by the fog to forward their secret operations. But I

took second thought. My withdrawal, hard on their heels, would bring me under suspicion. Miss Olive's eyes would note the circumstance, and what her eyes saw, Miss Olive's tongue would later impart. So, instead of following my wish, I approached Caroline Webb.

"Will you allow me to interrupt your reading?" I asked. Indeed, she appeared more busy with her thoughts than with the volume she held. Taking advantage of her rather indifferent consent, I continued: "I regret you didn't let me finish my explanation of my presence here, when we were talking before dinner."

"No explanation to me is necessary," she answered, "so long as Mr. Corwin is satisfied. I'm not mistress of Webb House."

"Yet the house bears your name."

"It used to be my home," was her simple answer.

"Well, just the same I consider myself your guest. Mark what I say, I'm not Mr. Corwin's guest, under no circumstance his. So please change your mind on that point."

She turned her face to me.

"It's very strange; I don't understand your words."

"Let me repeat; I'm really your guest, not Mr. Corwin's, and though he really asked me to stop here on his invitation, I refused. I informed him, however, that I was acquainted with you, indeed, had come this morning to call upon you, though perhaps the hour was not well chosen. You may think I was presuming on my slight service of yesterday, yet I wanted to see you again; it was well that I should see you. He suggested, then, that I come as your guest—Mr. Corwin imagines, I fancy, that I'm spying on his projects, or something like that—and to this I agreed. I should have consulted you first, but you were away, and I wanted to get into Webb House. I never saw the man before to-day, never had spoken to him, never had anything to do with him. As a matter of fact, you see, I'm nobody's guest but yours."

"How strange he should ask you on my account!" she said.

"Not when you understand it. I am under suspicion as a stranger in Ceriçia—he wants me here, where Mr. Ratchford can watch me until he himself returns. So you see I'm on your hands."

She sat up straight, and I observed that her face had more animation, more friendliness, than heretofore.

"It all sounds rather ridiculous," she said, "for Mr. Corwin is master here, and a real master, at that. I've no idea who you are, Mr. Masson, but what could I do except suppose you were one of his associates, like Mr. Ratchford and Mr. Malmesbury?"

"Never; never! I am not!"

Resting a cheek on hand, she remained pensive.

"My aunt and cousin are staying on his invitation," she said, at last, "and, for that matter, so am I—though, so far as I'm concerned, it's as if I'm here on sufferance. I don't understand why he allows us to remain at all. But my tongue is running away with me, I fear. I mustn't talk in this fashion."

"Perhaps Mr. Corwin likes you for yourself," I said.

"No, no. He has said he likes young people about, but something tells me there's some other motive. Tell me honestly, are you or are you not a friend of his?"

Her eyes met mine in question so fully and so frankly that he would have been a scoundrel, indeed, who could have given her a glib lie for answer; her own honesty was so transparent that honesty alone would serve to make reply.

"On my word of honor, I'm not," I said earnestly. "Let us go somewhere else, where we'll be able to speak freely.

Then I'll tell you exactly who I am and why I'm here. Your Cousin Olive is eaten by curiosity to know what we're talking about."

For some time I had been aware that the other girl, Olive Belknap, who sat across the room, had had her eyes fastened upon me; was, in fact, gnawed by enviousness to overhear our words.

Miss Webb arose. "Let us go into father's—I mean Mr. Corwin's library," she said, placing her book in the chair. "We'll be undisturbed there."

On the instant, her cousin was alert. "Caroline, where are you going?" she demanded sharply.

The surf on the beach might better have expected an answer. Miss Webb's head went up a trifle higher, that was all. There was a telltale color in her cheeks, to be sure, and I saw her grip her hands; but, so far as Olive was concerned, she received no satisfaction.

"This is the way, through this door," she said quietly.

The room into which she led me adjoined the living room; a combination of library and office.

"This library was father's; it's now mine," Caroline Webb informed me, with a gesture that swept the bookcases. "I'll take the books with me when I go. Be seated, Mr. Masson, and I'll be pleased to hear what you have to say. Let me first explain my own position here. When Mr. Corwin took possession of the house, I told him I could not immediately leave it. So he told me to remain until I was ready to go. He included my aunt and my cousin in the invitation, and they were delighted to accept, especially as there was a prospect of the company of gentlemen. He since has asked us all to continue here as guests. This may seem strange to you and an unasked confidence, but there's no reason why I shouldn't tell it to you, as you'd learn it in time. The others of the household would probably take pains later on to give you the information."

"If it's unpleasant under what was once your own roof, I'd have thought you would have gone away," I said.

She gave me an odd look, bit her lip, and contented herself by saying that circumstances did not at present permit her to leave—an answer that made me flush a hundred colors, for her words meant no less than that she was without money.

"When I can move my personal effects away, I shall go," she went on. "I want you to have no misunderstanding as to my position in this house."

"I honor you for it," I replied.

Adequate speech was out of question when I considered that, against her will, she had been compelled to suffer the company of the two Englishmen, so disagreeable to her, and the supercilious treatment of her own relations. With what fine spirit, with what nobility, she had accepted misfortune! Nor had she yielded an inch in her esteem and pride. As I looked at her warm, blue eyes, her clear, white brow, her firm, smooth cheeks, and finely shaped mouth, now so grave, I forgot that I had come to Cericia on a careless adventure, and desired only to be of service to her.

"They shall treat you civilly from this time on, all of them—or they'll have me to deal with!" I said. "Corwin, Ratchford, Malmesbury, your aunt, your cousin, I don't care who the person is!"

She softly clapped her hands. Her eyes sparkled. She drew nearer.

"Now I believe you; now I know you're not a friend of these other men here!" she exclaimed. "For you're angry, you're in earnest."

"Well, I'm in earnest and mean what I say, at any rate—and I hope you know, at last, I want to be your friend."

That brought her to a pause.

"The whole thing is cloudy to me. You never saw me until yesterday; you never knew me. Why, then, should you want to be my friend? Why, indeed, should you want to come into Webb House as my guest? Or come at all? I don't like mysteries, things I don't understand."

I got on my feet and began to walk about, an unmannerly habit, I admit. But the thought of her helplessness in this household, of the ill treatment to which she had been subjected, and, most of all, the fact she was not trustful of me, created a stress of feeling in my breast that must have some outlet.

"Caroline Webb, I'll talk straight out to you as I would to a man," said I, halting by the table and looking down at her. "You and I are partners in the Cericia estate. We own it—not Corwin."

Her eyes grew round.

"What!" she finally managed to gasp.

"True, every word. We own Cericia, we own everything here." I made a gesture that included most of the North American continent. "Corwin owns nothing; he's a fraud, a swindler, a criminal!"

"What—what's that you're saying?" she repeated.

"The truth." I lowered my voice, which, under the excitement of the moment, had risen to a higher pitch, and glanced toward the door, then asked: "Do you think your cousin may be eavesdropping? She was decidedly interested in what we were about."

"Of course not. She couldn't stoop so far. Go on with what you were saying—my heart's in a tumult."

A fine color had come into her face. She eagerly leaned forward, with elbows on the table, lips parted, look riveted on mine.

"Very well. Not to keep you in suspense, you wrote to Mr. James McIntyre, of Philadelphia, your father's former friend and partner. Your letter was about the Cericia estate. I'm his nephew, and he has deeded his share of the property to me. So, you see, we're partners now, as I said. I'm here to help you, to oust these scoundrels who've taken possession of your inheritance. The property was never sold to Corwin, it was never legally mortgaged. You're still mistress of Webb House, despite everything."

Caroline Webb half rose from her seat. She put out a trembling hand.

"Then you are really a friend; I'm not utterly alone in the world!" she cried softly. "Oh, I can hardly believe it!"

Just what happened after that I do not clearly recollect. I recall that presently she was dabbing her eyes with a handkerchief and that I sat on the table's edge, pressing one of her hands and speaking comforting words.

And just then Olive Belknap sailed into the room!

"Caroline Webb!" she exclaimed, in horrified tones, after a look. "Caroline Webb, what are you doing! I declare, you're standing here with this stranger holding your hand." The said hand was swiftly withdrawn. "I would think you'd be ashamed of yourself! I always said your high-and-mighty manner was nothing but pretense, that you could be sly when no one was around."

The other put away her handkerchief and came about to face the speaker like an insulted princess.

"Now, and never, have you had a right to question my actions," she said, in a voice trembling with anger. "Leave the room; leave the room, Olive, at once!"

Her cousin, whose face wore a snappish and exultant look, was about to retort; but, under the fire of Caroline Webb's eyes, she hesitated, quailed, finally turned about with a flirt of her dress, and whipped away.

"There, now we've done it," my companion said, but with no particular regret in her tones.

"Broken the household eggs, so to say," I suggested.

"Aunt Belknap and Olive will be thinking and saying scandalous things of me now—and I didn't know you were holding my hand, Mr. Masson."

"I knew it; I clung to it," I said.

A smile quivered on her face, then she turned to me with a laugh.

"It was ridiculous, wasn't it? But I just had to cry a little—I'd been under such a strain, what with father's death and what with seeming to have lost everything. I didn't even have enough money to go away, and I didn't know anything about what I might have and what I might not. Mr. Corwin stepped in and took charge of everything; I never even got a look at father's desk. At times I was almost ready to throw myself in the water and end it all with father."

"We shall make it very unpleasant for Mr. Corwin before we've finished," I said. "But I'm afraid we've a fight on our hands just at present."

Her look softened, and she lifted her head and looked up at me with a countenance so clear and bright that it was like light dispelling fog off the sea. I knew she was thinking of her father who so unhappily had been drowned; I knew that she understood now what had baffled her in trying to think it possible that he had left her unprovided for, left her nothing of Cericia. At length she brought her eyes back to mine, with so happy, with so tender a gaze it seemed that my pulses quickened and my whole being stirred with an accountable delight. By all truth, no eyes ever looked so lovely as did hers that moment, nor any face so beautiful!

Then she said:

"I want to be alone. I want to think of my happiness and dream of it by myself. Good night, my friend—my partner."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CABIN IN THE WOOD.

Next morning, Caroline Webb joined me for a stroll on the lawn before the house, where the sun now shone brightly and where we could talk without fear of being overheard. The others sat on the veranda, pretending to ignore us, though from time to time their glances fell our way. It was not long until Malmesbury detached himself from the group to saunter abdut; then, at last, with every appearance of aimlessness, strolled round the house and away. There was nothing unusual in this. But a moment later, when Caroline and I, at a turn of our promenade, came in sight of the rear, I perceived that the Englishman's pace had quickened to a swift stride, his shoulders betokened business, and he hastened, too, with something like furtiveness, past the sheds that stood behind the house, and was about to bury himself in the wood. If ever a man seemed desirous of escaping observation, it was he.

"Come, walk this way, round the corner, until we're out of sight of your aunt and the others," I said to my companion. "I want to see what he's up to."

She did as I asked. When we were quite out of view of the veranda, I halted her by a touch on the arm.

"Wait here," said I. "Let me learn where he's going."

"I want to come, too," was her quick answer.

"No, you must stay here. One he may not notice; two of us he'd be sure to see."

Thereupon I discovered that while my partner was most charming, she had in her nature a fiber of pro-

nounced perversity. She clutched my elbow, she firmly shut her lips.

"I'm going, too," she declared; "I wish to know what he's about, just as much as you do."

"Now, don't argue, there's no time," I said hurriedly, "or he'll be out of sight, and lost. You must stay behind —and, if there's anything doing, I'll tell you all about it when I return. A girl can't do this thing of trailing a man properly, anyway." With which statement, more plain than polite, I dashed toward the wood.

The wood was chiefly of pine, with clumps of undergrowth, which allowed a fair view for some distance. I moved after my quarry with all the caution at my command, lest a foot on a stick should betray I was after him. When he was well in the timber, he bent eastward, so as to pass in the rear of the village, and yet not be more than two hundred yards or so from the fringe of trees, moving parallel with the beach. Presently we came to the road I recognized as being that to Hampden, up which he walked some distance.

First halting to light a cigarette, he entered the timber again, on the east side of the road, and just by a leaning pine. I had skirted the roadway while he proceeded along its open course, and now, in turn, I slipped across and in among the trees on the opposite side.

Fully a mile must have passed after leaving the road before I noticed a change in the character of the timber. The undergrowth began to thicken and live oaks appeared among the pines; all indications pointed to the near presence of water.

In the thicker growth, Malmesbury entirely disappeared from sight, which necessitated a yet more circumspect advance on my part.

Creeping forward from bush to bush, taking advantage of every shadow of cover, I suddenly stopped. There, just ahead, was the eave of a cabin. I waited and drew breath, then once more edged forward. Now I had a better view. An old log house, apparently long abandoned, which stood in a little clearing where the path led, and fronting a sluggish creek, was the end of my search.

I peered at the end of the cabin, some ten paces distant. The rotting abode was without sign of life. Malmesbury was nowhere to be seen. The only sound was the guttural squawking of a water fowl somewhere off on the creek. And for five minutes I remained unmoving, with my eye over a bush, scrutinizing the creek, the surrounding undergrowth, the cabin, the earth. But only an oppressive silence lay over the spot.

Suddenly Malmesbury stepped forth from the hut. The door of the rude structure fronted toward the creek, in the side that was barely visible in my line of vision. Instantly I sank under my screen, through which, however, I could dimly see the man. He sauntered forward a pace or two, yawned, had a look at his timepiece, cast a glance about, then strolled toward the creek, where, on the bank, he made a seat of a stump, produced a flask, and wet his whistle, then finally restored the liquor to its pocket and gave himself up to reflection.

Ten minutes passed. He had another drink and another look at his watch, and hummed a well-known, lively Scotch air. At the end of that period there came from southward, down the creek, a soft, pulsing sound, which resolved itself into the swish of oars. Malmesbury arose. Presently a boat shot into sight and turned in to the bank where the Englishman was; I did not at first distinguish the newcomer, his back alone being visible as he rowed, but when he sprang out upon the earth I saw the man was the Mexican, Moreles.

Immediately, and before uttering a word, he lifted a warning hand. The pair of men remained listening. Carefully I opened the twigs of my bush so that I should miss nothing of the scene.

All at once Moreles pointed in the direction he had come, while speaking a few low words. Malmesbury appeared to ask a question. There was a further exchange of speech, brief and hurried, then the two men made fast the skiff and stole into the cover, some twenty feet away from the boat, where the clearing ceased.

Once more silence reigned over the spot. With renewed consciousness of my environment, I was aware of the smell of slime, of the oppressiveness of the unstirring trees, of the dead hush of the old cabin. But now, too, there was a sense, also, of lurking mischief, if not danger, which these surroundings only the more intensified.

There sounded a second time the soft beat of oars on water. The creak was fainter, less audible, than had been the case with Moreles, the rower apparently being more skillful. As a matter of fact, I had but just detected the sound when the boat came in view, was instantly checked, and rested for a time while its occupant examined the clearing. Then, under the propulsion of a noiseless stroke, the skiff glided to bank.

The rower carefully observed once more the open space, the cabin, and the surrounding cover of trees and brush. Apparently satisfied that all was well, he thrust an oar into the mud in order to pole his boat upstream, where it would be hidden. When he came to the spot where bushes fell in a thick mass over the water, he pushed in among them. Both boat and Lafe Dodds, the rower—for Lafe it was—passed from sight. Almost in the same breath, Malmesbury and Moreles appeared out of their cover on the south side of the clearing, passed like a pair of shadows across the open space, again to vanish among the vines—a pair of wolves.

Some minutes passed. Next a bush stirred, and Dodds' face came in sight. He peered at the hut. After a little he stepped wholly out of his screen, though preserving his caution and keeping close to the brush while he advanced on the house.

Followed a stir in the adjoining cover, a tearing and bursting of vines, and two figures hurled themselves upon Dodds, from whose lips issued a startled yell. The clearing was no longer hushed and still, but an arena where three locked forms writhed and tossed and dragged in a furious struggle. Curses came fierce and choked from the three men's throats, bodies thumped and flopped on the earth. But at last superior weight told. Dodds lay panting, crushed, vanquished, under his captors.

The Mexican, putting a hand to his hip, drew a revolver. His knee was on Dodds' chest, his left hand gripped Dodds' wrist. He looked inquiringly at Malmesbury.

"Shall it be now?" he asked.

For a single angry breath the Englishman appeared about to assent, then he shook his head.

"Not yet," he said, breathing heavily. "Wait till we learn how much he knows. If he's learned anything and told it, we want to know the fact. After he talks, you can put out his light."

Then Malmesbury got to his feet. One end of his collar was torn loose, his cheek bore a scrape of mud. Murder, if I have ever seen it in a look, was in his eyes.

"Let him up, but keep the gun on his heart," he said.

Dodds slowly lifted himself off the ground. He was even in worse case than the Englishman; a crimson scratch scoring his temple and the shirt being

ripped off his shoulder. For the first time realization that he dealt with desperate men apparently reached his mind; his face was pale, he licked his lips while darting glances from one to the other of his captors. With the men's hands gripping him, with Moreles' revolver pointed at his breast, he gazed at the very visage of death.

"What do you know; how much do you know?" Malmesbury demanded fiercely.

"Nothing," the young fellow snarled back.

"Talk!" The other lifted a threatening fist over him.

Whether despair or whether wild fear led Dodds to act, I know not—the chances were all against him. But act he did, striking down the revolver with the hand Malmesbury had let go, striking with the furious quickness of a cornered wild cat. The weapon on the ground, he tore himself free of the Mexican by a mad jerk, staggered for a second; then, gaining his balance, raced toward the very spot of cover where I knelt concealed and horrified by the scene.

Malmesbury was instantly after him. The boy had, however, a start of a good ten feet, with terror speeding his limbs. As he rushed straight on me, my heart sank, for I realized that my own discovery could not be aught but certain. Nevertheless, I crouched still lower, instinctively pushed myself deeper into my bush, and held my breath.

Sweeping the stems of my shelter, Dodds sped by; his pursuer followed. Every second I expected to hear the report of Moreles' pistol, but he was either too slow in regaining it or he feared to wound Malmesbury, for the shot did not come. Instead, the Mexican himself ran forward, shouting to his companion. I dared not look over my shoulder to see the outcome of the chase; indeed, I could not, my head being deep in the bush. A slightest movement of my screen would betray me. Once again the Mexican uttered a fierce shout at Malmesbury, then halted. To my consternation, he stopped directly by my side, leaving the other to continue the chase while he endeavored to follow the runners with his eye.

Now I altogether ceased to breathe. If I could have stopped the thumping of my heart, I would have gladly done so, even on condition of being rid of it forever. But neither its thunder nor the perspiration which burst out upon my face and which began to trickle down my cheeks could I control. At that minute, too, a gnat felt it incumbent upon himself to conduct an investigation in my ear—and I dared not move an eyelash.

Well, the inevitable happened. I moved not only an eyelash; I moved my whole body. Human flesh can endure but so much—I had reached, under the insect's torture, the end of my endurance. At first I thought the man had detected nothing. Hope began to flutter once more in my breast; the hope became almost assurance. Then a hand clutched my shoulder.

"Get up!" a rough voice commanded —Moreles' voice.

I backed from my cover and stood erect. The position which, three minutes earlier, Lafe Dodds had filled was now mine: the lower end of my breastbone was exactly and disconcertingly in front of the muzzle of the Mexican's revolver.

CHAPTER IX.

REALIZING ON A PARTNERSHIP.

Moreles was in no mood to tolerate trifling on my part; in truth, he appeared disposed to shoot me on the spot and be done with it, as I saw by the black look on his face, and so the matter hung for a moment. His natural taste leaned toward killing me; it

was only the fact that he was a subordinate in this Cerician business, I decided, and possibly curiosity to know who I was and what I was doing here, that caused him to hesitate.

"Don't pull the trigger, or Mr. Corwin will do the same by you," I said, at a venture. "I'm at Webb House, where I'm waiting until he returns. He can strike hard, Moreles, and he'll not be pleased if he finds you've been meddling with me."

He continued silent, while his glistening eyeballs moved to and fro in their sockets as he sought to gain the truth. At last he motioned me into the clearing.

"You run, I shoot," he warned.

Only too happy to avail myself of this reprieve, I preceded him to the boat, where he found a ball of fish cord with which he securely bound my wrists. He would take no chances. Next he led me to the old hut, made me sit down by a corner, and there added the final bit to my helplessness by knotting several yards of the cord about my ankles.

"When Malmesbury"—he pronounced the name with difficulty—"when he come back, we see. I guess you get shot up then."

On the time that remained until Malmesbury returned unquestionably depended my lease of life. The Englishman would but laugh at the argument I had used with Moreles. Moreover, I had revised my first notion of him that he was but a vulgar comedian, a poor villain, a cheap subordinate. The eagerness he showed to do away with Dodds ended that idea; he was a cold-blooded wretch, who would stop at nothing, if ever one walked this earth. He knew just how much of a guest of Corwin's I was. Now, when I was caught spying on his secret business, atop of Dodds' intrusion, he would give me short shrift.

After a final look at my bonds, the Mexican walked to the edge of the clearing, where Dodds and Malmesbury had raced out of sight. He stood staring and listening into the wood. There came no sound. The sunshine still fell in patches here and there upon the clearing before the cabin, the boughs of the trees hung heavy and motionless, the same dank, lifeless smell of decayed vegetation and stagnant water pervaded the place.

I rummaged my wits to hit on some idea by which to persuade or to bribe or to wheedle my guard to set me free. But I had none. In his present state of cold hostility, I saw that neither arguments nor money nor sympathy would avail me a jot. If I opened my lips to speak a word he would answer me by a sneer or a blow, for even in his posture I could read his savage heart.

Presently he returned. He took up a station a pace or so before where I half reclined against the cabin, and, while regarding me with an irritating insolence of manner, proceeded to roll a cigarette.

"Will you oblige me with a match, señor, yes?" he asked, putting out a hand. Then he indulged in a mocking laugh, showing all his teeth.

"I have matches," I said, "but I expect to use them myself."

At that he laughed even louder.

"Five minutes, maybe ten, then Señor Malmesbury will return," he stated caressingly. "Then we learn why you come here, why you hide with your neck in a bush. Afterward I will put a string around your head, so"—he inscribed a circle in the air with forefinger—"and you will talk, you will be very glad to talk when I twist a little stick in the string. Maybe you think not to talk, but not long, my friend. I know the way. Ha! You think it not funny?"

I remained silent. Time was flying, too many minutes had been wasted

without my utilizing them in forming some plan of release. And yet was a plan possible? The cords that held my wrists were so closely and cunningly drawn that they cut my flesh and checked the blood. Every instant the throbbing in my arms grew more painful. My feet, too, were helpless. With my back against the logs and my knees drawn up to my chin, it seemed as if all ability to execute any plan was lacking. Despair suddenly overwhelmed me. I was completely pinioned, helpless; the Mexican fingers had been too shrewd. It seemed that all I could do was to surrender to the inevitable.

Perhaps something of my feelings was depicted on my face—my situation was, in truth, enough to make any one pale; at any rate, Moreles chuckled.

"You begin look very scared. Bah, you have heart of a chicken! Maybe you want say prayers. All right, all right. Señor Malmesbury be walking here soon, then no time for prayers."

Once more he gazed at the place where he expected the Englishman to return. Finally he moved down to the boat, where he busied himself at something or other. Now, if ever, was the time when I should free myself; and it is needless to say that I exerted every fiber of strength to burst my cords. No use.

Just then the Mexican stepped out of the boat upon the bank. He advanced a pace or two, then halted, in order to turn his head toward the place where Lafe Dodds had concealed his boat. I prayed a fervent prayer that he might be directed thither, but when he fixed his look on me, as if to see how his prisoner fared, I felt that prayers were never answered. However, I closed my eyes, I hung my jaw, I let my body slump down with every appearance of dejection. Finally, through my eyelashes, I perceived him starting toward the bushes that overhung the creek. There the boat lay, there my prayer seemed to have found its answer.

At that instant, there came a whisper:

"Mr. Masson, Mr. Masson!"

It came from the corner of the cabin close by. I jerked my head about. Part of a face—a smooth, soft cheek, one blue eye, a corner of a mouth, a glimpse of golden hair—showed at that selfsame corner, not a yard from me. Then the whole head and face came into view—Caroline Webb's!

"Go away, run! For Heaven's sake, go back!" I answered fiercely. "That man's a monster. Get out of the wood, go home!"

She did not move. A look of determination, almost of defiance, rested on her face.

"I won't go; I won't go, at all," she said.

"You will; you must—you can't stay here!"

"He said he was going to kill you; I heard him!" she replied. "I won't let you be killed—and I won't go home unless you do, too!"

"You're mad!" said I. "And, anyway, how can I go home? Don't you think I'd go home if I could? Now go at once; he'll be turning."

"I'll not, never. Just wait."

Her head vanished in just the nick of time, for the Mexican had turned for a last, deliberate examination of me before he parted the bushes that overhung Dodds' boat. I was quick enough to let my chin fall on my breast. To all appearances, I think, I was the most heartsick prisoner in the world—though God knows I was anything but that. Well, so far as he could see, the aspect of his prisoner, of the cabin, and the clearing was what it had been. At any rate, he pushed the bushes apart and thrust his head and shoulders down into them in order to view Dodds' boat.

I glanced over my shoulder at the corner of the cabin. First what ap-

peared to be a bush came into view. It stopped. Shielded by it—ah, cunning little brain!—stealthily appeared Caroline Webb's head. She was taking for her own the primitive savage's craft. If Moreles should chance to lift his look back at the cabin, it might pass over those twigs as nothing but what had been.

"Listen, I'll help you," she said again, in a whisper.

"You can't. Besides, the danger's too great. You must go home. I'll get away, never fear." And I spoke words my heart did not echo.

"I don't go without you," she whispered. "Now pay attention—here are my sewing scissors. Lucky I had them. Cut your strings. I'll be in the bushes behind the house when you come—and you must come. Then we'll skip home."

The little scissors she tossed forward struck my knee, fell to the ground. Instantly my bound hands covered them. Down by the creek the bushes rustled again, then the Mexican emerged once more, shoulders and head.

"Get back, Caroline; get back!" I almost cried aloud. But she had already disappeared.

Moreles came forward, beating a leaf off his beard. Evidently his curiosity concerning Lafe Dodds' boat was satisfied, and he was again impatient for Malmesbury's return. He listened at the edge of the clearing, as he had done before. Finally he rolled his habitual cigarette, inspected me afresh, and asked a question:

"What you come here for?"

"I wanted to see who lived here," I answered.

"Did you see in the house?"

"How could I see inside it when I had only come to the place where you found me?" I replied, pretending weariness.

"When you dead, it make no difference what you see and what you don't see." He showed his teeth in a smile, then walked to the door of the log house. There he paused for a last scrutiny of the wood, in the direction he expected Malmesbury. Then he passed within.

Next instant I was at work with the desperation of a man to whom seconds are golden and to whom minutes mean life. The little scissors unfolded, I got my thumb and finger into their handles. Setting my teeth—for by now the cords cut deep and my wrists were swollen—I reached down and labored at the bonds of my feet. The fish cord was made of good stuff; it seemed an age before I severed the strands, and I lived in an agony of fear lest Moreles step forth.

But finally I had one cord cut, then a second. I tore at them until I got them off, until I could spread my feet apart with the eager joy of released muscles. From within the cabin came the sound of the Mexican moving about at some business or other. Rising to my feet, I stole to the corner of the hut, around it. On the mossy ground my feet made no sound. Under a sawn window that looked upon the rear I bent low until I was past.

Then I looked about. The bushes stood in thick clumps everywhere, that hardly allowed a passage; and where, in this maze, I was to find the girl who had saved me, I did not know. But all at once a hand waved, a face appeared some dozen feet before me.

"Here, come here!" Caroline whispered.

Almost at the same instant I heard an angry curse. I glanced over my shoulder. Framed in the sawn window of the old cabin, looking out upon the rear, I saw the dark, enraged face of the Mexican.

I plunged into the bushes where Caroline Webb stood, caught her by the arm, and dragged her aside and deeper

in. A report rang from the hut, a bullet whined close by among the leaves.

"I'm scared to death," Caroline said.

"So am I—but not as much as I was," I answered.

And we pushed still farther into the undergrowth.

CHAPTER X.

ONE WAY TO BE RID OF A POOR RELATION.

Caroline had already snipped the cords that held my wrists. So, seizing her hand, I bent low and drew her as rapidly as possible after me a dozen yards into the dense cover, then swerved sharply to the right, bearing northward and away from the direction the Mexican would naturally suppose we should take.

"Rest a bit here," I whispered to her, when we were some fifty paces distant from the hut and buried in a jungle of bush and vines. "Silence will count now more than speed."

She crouched beside me, her hand still gripping mine, her head, with its crown of golden hair half loosed by our rough passage, close by.

A shout sounded from the hut:

"Come out, you, or I shoot! Come 'long, quick!" Which was followed by a number of savage oaths.

Caroline's hand closed yet tighter on my fingers; her eyes sought mine in question.

"Don't stir," I breathed. "He doesn't see us. He's standing just back of the house, and trying a bluff."

Another minute of profound silence ensued. So still was it that on a leaf by my ear I could catch the note of a tiny insect engaged in some delicate vibration of its wings.

"Come, you—I see you; I shoot!" cried Moreles again.

The second call proved my statement that he was bluffing; for, during the interval of quiet the man had stolen into the underbrush, doubtless along the faint path to the cabin, and his shouted warning come from a distance west of the first. He was stealthily searching the vicinity.

"Now is your time to slip away," I said to my companion. "I'll lead, and force a way. Keep close behind me, and come as swiftly as you can. Whatever happens, don't be alarmed. We must get a start while we have time. He'll presently begin to look for footprints and crushed twigs."

Parting the vines before us, we set out on a noiseless withdrawal. We could not move rapidly; but, nevertheless, we made steady progress northward. Once again, for the last time, we heard a shout. At the end of ten minutes we were two hundred yards away from the abandoned cabin, with a dense growth of vegetation between that would delay pursuit, however skillful the tracker.

Our feet made no sound on the moist earth; hardly a rustle was imparted by the heavy leaves as they fell into place behind us. Close at my heels came Caroline, with a steadfast courage, a skillful use of openings, a quick pliancy of shoulder and limb, that filled my heart with admiration. Indeed, at times she followed so silently that I would glance back in fear lest she had missed the way.

Once, while we paused to rest, I said:

"What a stanch comrade you are! You know the truth; I owe my life to you."

"Could I pick up my skirts and run away like a frightened child when you were in danger?" Then, with a trustful look, she continued: "Aren't we partners? You came to Cericia to help me. I could do no less than help you; I couldn't leave you alone there, in that terrible man's hands. We have to stand by each other all the time, that's all."

No words of mine could answer such

bravery of heart, such loyalty, such steel of spirit. I caught and pressed her hand and let my eyes speak for me.

Then I led the way on. Diverging gradually westward as we advanced, we emerged from the denser, junglelike growth into the more open fringe of bushes among the pines. Here the ground was drier, our course more free. Fifty yards farther west the underbrush yielded almost entirely to timber.

Twenty minutes later we reached the Hampden Road, crossed it, and entered the trees on the opposite side. Not until then did I breathe relief. Somehow that line of road seemed the dividing line between danger and safety.

By making a broad circle, we came down the timber until we heard the beat of the surf and smelled the brine of the sea. We reached the beach some way west of the house, turned toward the latter, and gained its rear, under shelter of the trees.

"We must go in the back door," Caroline said. "My hair is a fright, my nose is scratched, my hands are dirty—and look at my dress! Did you ever see anything like it!"

While I made my toilet, my thoughts occupied themselves in an attempt to piece together the little I knew of the Cerician mystery. But the matter was baffling. Aside from a greater certainty that some conspiracy was on foot, a fuller realization of the plotters' desperate character, I possessed scarcely more than I had before. One thing I decided—Caroline Webb must leave Cericia; she must go at once. As for myself, I would give as good an account as I was able.

For a first step, I removed from my bag my automatic pistol, a small but powerful weapon, and placed it in my pocket. I suspected that both of the Englishmen went armed—I would at least be on an equality with them in that respect.

I went out into the upper hallway. When Caroline Webb joined me, we went down into the kitchen, where we obtained sandwiches and milk from the negress cook, with whom Caroline was an especial favorite, and satisfied our hunger. Then we went forth toward the front of the house.

"Remember that you're to pretend absorption in your fruit orchard, or cabbage patch, or whatever it is you've said you came for," she warned, halting me for a moment in the dining room. "Then aunt will stop inquiring after a while, though, of course, she'll not be at rest at all. She's very suspicious of you—and will be of me, too, now."

"Leave the matter in my hands," I answered. "She'll know more of cabbages before she's done than she ever dreamed existed. Who's that speaking?" I concluded abruptly, touching her arm.

Voices sounded from the adjoining room, scarcely lessened by the thin curtains that hung in the doorway.

"The man was in Brown's store, I tell you," Ratchford was saying, in a sharp tone. "I'll put something in his ear that he'll remember, I warrant—he had his orders to stay away from Cericia. Next thing this fellow Masson, or that seaweed paddler, or one of the villagers, will grow curious and want to know what a Mexican's doing here and where he camps down."

"What can you do? He's been told," Malmesbury answered. "A Mex never likes to be alone—he grows melancholy for company. The people are like the French and Italians."

"What the devil!" the other exclaimed. "Here we have him come creeping over at night for provisions, then he goes to the store to drink in open daylight. It shall stop, or he steps out of the game. We'll take Moreles' boat away, I'm thinking. That should keep him where he should be."

At this stage in their talk there came

an interruption, apparently from the veranda. It was Olive Belknap who spoke, asking if they were never coming outside. An impatient oath—a mutter that I surmised to issue from Ratchford's lips—just reached my ears.

"We're coming, Bright Eyes," Malmesbury returned jovially.

And by the sound of their dying voices I knew the men had followed her outside.

Caroline Webb turned to me.

"I wonder what they meant. I believe —I believe, yes, they meant that awful man at the cabin who was going to kill you."

"Exactly. They're all in the same crew—tarred with the same stick."

"But why should Mr. Ratchford object to his being at the store?" And she added: "What has that terrible man to do with Mr. Corwin, anyway, and with these others?"

"That's what I'm doing my best to find out," I said.

Caroline and I advanced toward the group with friendly bearing and the manner of persons having nothing whatever to conceal, no secrets, no sins. Mrs. Belknap's eye rolled to meet us. For a moment her regard remained impersonal, then there came upon her lips a smile that boded us no good. Finally she shook a playful finger at Caroline.

"Ah, you sly mouse, why didn't you tell me!" she exclaimed. "All this time you've had a sweetheart, and been engaged, and planned on being married, and never said a word of it to a soul! But you never wore an engagement ring, that's the reason; however, you can put it on now. No, I never dreamed of such a thing until Olive saw you last night, weeping on your lover's shoulder, and came to inform me."

"Ah, she told you, did she?" I answered, quietly enough, though black rage was in my heart. "Thoughtful of Olive, very. But I imagine Olive would always do her duty."

A flash of the woman's eyes greeted this statement, but she continued her honeyed chiding of her niece.

"Well, well, Carry, dear. Under all the circumstances it's probably the thrifty thing to do, as you have no means now. You may wear your engagement ring after this without pretense. But it's a surprise, a great surprise, dearie. Is the day set for the wedding?"

I glanced at Caroline. Her lips were compressed, her cheeks white, and there was something like wonder in her eyes at hearing these words fall from her aunt. Mrs. Belknap lifted her glass, from which she had a sip of lemonade.

"Madam, you've grossly insulted your niece," said I. "Unhappily your daughter was the accidental witness of what she had no business to see, and what she couldn't possibly understand; and, on her report, you're uttering malicious and heartless implications, with no other purpose than to embarrass and wound Miss Webb. So far as I'm concerned, I'll state for your benefit that marriage with her would be the greatest honor to which I could aspire, and, if ever I'm so fortunate, the greatest happiness I shall ever know. When she sees fit to announce her marriage to any one, doubtless you'll learn then of her engagement." A grateful look from Caroline came to me at this defense. "And, I think I may safely say, the fact you've been a guest here when Webb House was her home need cause you no needless anxiety that she will importune you for advice or affection or financial aid when she does marry. Is that not the case, Miss Webb?"

"It is, it is! I shall ask nothing of aunt!" she cried.

"Then that ends the matter," said I. "I'm pleased to have lifted this load from your mind, Mrs. Belknap." And taking Caroline by the hand, I led her into the house.

CHAPTER XI.

CAROLINE WEBB.

"I want to be away from them, away from the house, out in the open air, where I can breathe!" Caroline said, when we were once more inside. "Let us go up the beach, out of their sound and sight. It makes no difference now what they think of us, and there shall be no further pretense. Oh, I'm unhappy! Well as I knew aunt, I had never suspected her capable of such baseness. And I've been kind to her; I've really done my best to be kind to her."

"I fear your aunt and cousin are opportunists," I said, hesitating before her distress. "People like them, I'm sorry to say, can't be depended on to stick long, for they're fair-weather creatures. They abandon old friends without scruple to warm themselves at new ones' fires, if the latter seem brighter."

She was pensive for a time, then turned to me with moist eyes.

"You proved yourself a true friend, at any rate," she said softly. "When you accepted her absurd statement as a fact and told her what you did, it immediately made me happy and restored my pride. She tried to humiliate me, and failed. I'm more grateful than I can speak."

"Have you forgotten what you said in the wood yonder? We're partners, aren't we?"

"Yes, we are."

"Well, that's the principal thing for us," I continued. "All we have to do is to stand together, and we'll win out against them. But when your aunt and your cousin learn that, after all, Mr. Corwin isn't the gentleman they believe him to be, with the added fact that you're still mistress of Webb House and of Cericia, their feelings, I'll venture to say, will be mingled ones, and their remorse extreme."

Leaving the house, unobserved, by a side door, we walked a mile or so westward along the sands. Under the afternoon sun the waters were flashing brightly. The incoming swells uncurled along the beach in long lines of foam that deposited at our feet the waves' small plunder of the sea—little, iridescent shells, strands of seaweed, water-soaked sticks, starfish, vegetable pods, curious tiny forms of sea life from out the depths, dead or dying.

At last we reached a tree trunk cast up in some storm and now lying half embedded in the sand. On this we seated ourselves. Fronting our eyes was the whole glittering expanse of the Gulf, seeming never so fair and never so smiling as on this day. How much more peaceful, how much calmer and happier was one here, in the sunlight of open day, than in the secretive, hostile atmosphere of Webb House!

"This," said I, turning with a smile to my companion—"this is the way Cericia will be when they're all gone—when your foolish aunt and cousin have withdrawn, when these plotting adventurers have been scattered. Cericia—what a charming name!"

"I can hardly wait for the time," she answered.

She sat with elbow on knee, chin in cupped hand, gazing out across the water. The breeze stirred the little, golden locks about her temples, a rosy tint lingered in her cheeks, and blue as was the sky, it was not so blue as her eyes.

"If you had not come here, I should have had to go away," she said, breaking the pause. "There seemed no path out of my thicket of troubles except to break through; I could not have borne matters much longer. No one will know how dispirited I've been, while at the same time living in deadly fear—I tell you this because I trust you, because I feel as if you were a brother. Oh, you can't guess in what terrible

anxiety and dread I've waited. Mr. Corwin came first of all, so soon, too, after father's death, and showed me a deed that he said was signed by father and Mr. McIntyre, and stated that the land was now mortgaged. This I've already told you. He convinced aunt immediately by his story—she and Olive are the only living relations I have—and what could I do? Where could I turn? He locked father's papers up, and, when I asked to see them, put me off from day to day. And then these two other men came, who seem to having nothing to do but idle and just look after the freight Sam Brown hauls over and stores somewhere. Olive is delighted to have them here—yes, and quite silly over Mr. Ratchford."

"I can imagine what you've endured," said I.

"All the while I felt things were not right," she went on. "For days I've been suspicious, and, because of my suspicions, I ceased to talk of my affairs to aunt, and, instead, wrote to Mr. McIntyre. Even at this minute my cheeks burn to think how I was situated; I had only a few dollars, the clothes I own. I could do nothing, not even go away. And when I asked Mr. Corwin if there wasn't some money in father's safe, just a little, he said no, none. This didn't seem to me the way estates are settled, though a girl knows so tiny a bit of such affairs. Finally I took the small amount of money I had and went to Hampden, and from there to the county seat, to find out what I could—deeds had to be attended to there, I had heard, but I learned from one of the officials only that Mr. Corwin had filed his deed and some one else had recorded a mortgage. I was in despair. I had just enough money to bring me back here, that was all. And I was on my way home when you so kindly let me come over with you from Hampden."

"No wonder you were silent and depressed that afternoon," I said sympathetically.

The last of her story had come out with a rush, with now and again a quiver of her lip. I had not interrupted her, for I saw that it was the relief which my presence gave her, the knowledge of a friend at hand, that caused this flooding of pent-up emotion, of past restraints, and long-harbored fears. Speech would give her peace of mind; it would bring new cheer and courage.

"During that afternoon ride home with you and Mr. Dempster," she stated firmly, "I was making up my ideas to pack a few things, ride back to Hampden, walk if I must, even the whole way, and leave Cericia forever. I didn't know where I should go, but I had some schoolgirl friends, could I but reach them, who would shelter me until I could decide something. Webb House had grown impossible for me."

Well, I was too much affected by her account to be able at once to reply. So I rose and paced to and fro on the sand for a time, with my hands in my pockets and my chin on my breast. She had suffered. Her spirit had been bruised between stones. My anger against her heartless persecutors for the present was put aside; I felt only a deep hurt with her and a profound sympathy.

"You must go away; you must go away to-morrow," I said, at last. "I'll remain to dispose of matters, but you must go. You're unhappy here with these people; you're unhappy at Cericia, with the recollections of your father's tragic death still pressing upon your mind. Yes, you must depart to-morrow. Uncle James will be glad to welcome you into his home, for he had a very tender friendship for your father, and you can visit there until everything here is straightened out and peace restored."

"No, I shall remain," said she.

"Then I'll surely have the murder of

these scoundrels on my soul," I stated, with a frown.

"You're kind, more than kind, to suggest my going to Mr. McIntyre, but to have you here, at this time, not only as a business companion, but as a friend, is sufficient, Mr. Masson. This is my home, and now that I know the truth about Cericia, I won't be driven out."

"But Ratchford—Malmesbury——" I began.

"You are here, and things will be different from now on," she interrupted. "Besides, I've a revolver that I bought in Hampden. I got it because Mr. Ratchford became—annoying."

After considering, I went on: "While your aunt's act was inexcusable, it may have better results than we suppose. It has cleared the air, so to speak. We all know now where we stand toward one another. I'm inclined to believe that both Ratchford and Malmesbury will be respectful if they judge you to be engaged. It may be advisable to let them continue to think so."

A faint blush appeared on her cheek. When she spoke, she kept her gaze steadfastly fixed upon the water.

"I doubt if I could pretend that very well," she said. "Engaged people are supposed to act like—like lovers."

"We'll just act ourselves," said I. "The idea is merely to have them hold the belief. Then your aunt will cease to bother you, your cousin will no longer be jealous of you because of the Englishmen——"

"Olive—jealous of me!" she cried, sitting up very straight. "Why, I detest those men! You don't imagine for an instant that I ever sought——"

"No, no, no, no," I hastened to assure her.

She remained undecided, apparently studying the subject. Once again a delicate color rose in her cheek at some thought, and she bit her lip.

"Forget this suggestion, it was a blundering one at best," I said quickly. "My intentions are honest, but my judgment is weak. We'll find some other way."

Her mouth closed in a firm line.

"I'd do anything to beat Mr. Corwin. Let them think we're engaged, if that's best—we know we're not. After things are cleared up, it will make no difference, because no doubt we'll sell Cericia, end our partnership, and the whole matter will be forgotten by everybody, ourselves included."

"What! Sell Cericia!" I cried. "Do you mean you want to sell the place; that we're not to see each other any more after all we've been through together?"

"There are but two things to do—sell it or keep it, one or the other."

"Sell it, never!" I went on, almost shouting. "Of course we'll keep it, and develop it just as your father planned. That's what I want, that's what you want—what everybody wants."

My sudden agitation at first astonished, then amused her.

"Why, I'd rather keep and develop it, to be sure," she said softly, "for father's sake if for no other reason. But I thought you would be glad to be done with such a troublesome property."

I gave a vast sigh of relief.

"That's settled, then, thank Heaven!" was my fervent response. "Never make that suggestion again—my heart isn't strong. It really isn't—Caroline." I uttered her name feebly and tentatively.

At that she broke into a merry laugh.

"You're a long ways from dying," she said. "Your heart's perfectly sound, I imagine. And you needn't shake in your boots when you speak my name, for if you're to play your part at being engaged, you'll have to use it regularly. I don't mind, anyway."

"Don't mind! Of all cold indiffer-

ence! I want you to like me to say it."

A fresh ripple of laughter came from her lips. Then she stood up, tucked back a little curl, and looked at me with her adorable blue eyes.

"All right, partner Tom," she replied, "I'll try."

CHAPTER XII.

A BLOW AT THE RIGHT TIME.

When Caroline and I returned to Webb House, her aunt and her cousin were nowhere to be seen, while Ratchford and Malmesbury loitered on the pier, at the foot of the slope before the dwelling, apparently engaged in talk of matters of their own. Since my companion expressed a need for rest, and went to her room, I decided to visit Dempster, whom I had neglected.

Arriving at his cottage, I found him in the rear, crumbling bread into a pan, while old Uncle Jerry was rapt in expounding the character of man's future punishment. Pausing, I remained unseen while the aged darky described what, according to his notion, sinners would suffer; until the scientist, perceiving me, winked an eye, though maintaining his melancholy visage.

"Dar be red-hot griddles fo' de white loss souls and red-hot griddles fo' de black loss souls bofe," Jerry stated, waving a hand. "An' no fountain to quench de thirst an' no hand to wipe off de sweat ob hell—jest debbles to poke de fi'."

Dempster crumbled his last crust and lifted the pan.

"I shall cogitate at profound length your elucidation——"

"Eluc'dation? Dat am a fine wo'd, Marse! What am dat wo'd?" The old negro scratched his wool and gazed at Dempster.

"It means the enlightenment of Hades that you've made." Then addressing me, he said: "Come along, Masson, I'm about to feed my pets." With which, he led the way toward the trees behind the cottage.

Curious to learn what pets other than dried specimens of seaweed he might have, I followed him to the spot, a few paces into the timber, and well out of observation, where was nailed on the trunk of a tree, at a height of six feet or so, a wooden crate containing pigeons. They immediately began to stir upon our approach, to emit low coos of welcome. Dempster fed them bread crumbs from his pan. One of the birds, even, he withdrew from the improvised cote in order to stroke.

"You didn't know I was a pigeon fancier, did you?" he asked, with a slow smile. "Up North, I've many of them, a squab farm, in fact, and some fancy birds, too. I love them; they're my weakness. I never go anywhere to stay a time without taking along a few of my favorites. See how gentle they are; look at this one on my hand." And he lifted the bird, with its beautiful head and glossy wings, up to my sight.

He petted the pigeon for a little, then returned it to its cage.

All at once he said:

"I didn't know that long-legged Englishman over at your house was a runner. Most long-legged men are not."

"What do you mean?" I inquired.

"Well, I saw him chasing that fellow Dodds out of the woods," he drawled, "and it set me wondering. I was sitting on the porch, this noon, doing nothing, when Dodds broke forth where the road comes on the beach, with the Englishman behind him. It sort of interested me. Dodds didn't slacken up any when he hit the sand, but kept on for the stores. The Englishman—what's his name?—gave up and stopped. Didn't look very pleased, and his collar was sticking up under one ear. I suppose they'd had trouble about that

Brown girl. Our village boy is some scrapper, taking on all you chaps at Webb House, one after another, the same day. I rather like his spirit."

"So do I. He's pretty nervy," I answered.

"How are you getting on with the men over there at the house?" he asked, after a deliberate measure of time.

"So-so."

"No love lost between you—is that it?"

"Not much. To be frank, Caroline Webb and I stand on one side, and the rest of the household on the other. Those men are criminals—dangerous men. I overheard enough to know that right after to-morrow they make their final move in some secret game they are playing, and go when Corwin comes back. I intend to have the sheriff here to take charge of Corwin. I'll take measures at once."

"I don't believe you can do that now," he said, watching the smoke lift from his cigar. "Your time is short. But listen! If anything should occur to put Miss Webb in danger, bring her here, or notify me. I'll come to Webb House. I'm not much of an athlete, still I could help defend her."

"Thank you, I'll do so. Have you any firearms—a revolver, or anything like that?"

"Firearms are out of my line. Now, if it were seaweed you wanted!" And he gazed at me with his amused smile.

"Well, I'll be going. I don't like to stay away from Webb House too long at a time."

"You say Mr. Corwin returns to-morrow?"

"To-morrow, or next day; that was his plan."

"It might be best to make no effort to have him arrested," Dempster said thoughtfully. "The man might turn ugly; and, besides, you'll get title to your property, in any case, in the end. Make matters safe for Miss Webb. That's best."

"He shall not go free, if I can prevent it," was my determined reply. "I certainly want him arrested, and the others with him."

Dempster laughed.

"I see that you're spoiling for a fight. It will be useless to argue with you further."

"True. I have my mind made up. Now I must be going." With which I set off.

On reaching the house, and finding no one about, I directed my steps to the library, the opportunity appearing propitious to carry on my investigation. A time when Caroline and I together could do this without discovery was not likely to occur, and Corwin would soon be returning. I decided to act on my own initiative, and at once. Until I could go through the filing cases, and open the desk and the safe, I should have no intelligent idea in regard to the estate, or to what extent Corwin had carried on his depredations since Mr. Webb's death.

For the moment, I passed the filing cases by. The locked desk excited my chiefest curiosity. Casting about the room until I found an old saber, doubtless a relic of Mr. Webb's Civil War days, I drew it from its sheath, and, by means of its point, sprung the lock of the desk's lid. Then I rolled the top up. One of Corwin's preserves I had now entered. I placed the saber by my foot and sat in the chair before the desk.

But that this was one of Corwin's preserves I presently began to question. I found no papers incriminating him; in fact, no documents belonging at all to the man. What letters, notes, memoranda, statements, and so forth, that were in the pigeonholes and the drawers antedated Corwin's coming to Webb House. They were Caroline's father's, and, in all probability, had remained un-

disturbed since his death. They would throw much light on business of the estate—concerning the conspirators, nothing. Corwin's papers, if he had any, were locked in his own room.

As I recalled the character of the man—cool, forceful, engaged with his own affairs—I began to suspect that he had not troubled to dip into Mr. Webb's business. He had made use of the property to raise money, and now, beyond keeping Caroline under his eye until he executed his present project, had no interest in it. Cericia was a squeezed orange. He did not care for the skin.

Of the circumstances of his appropriating the estate, I could but guess. Probably he had known Mr. Webb; knew, too, that the property was unmortgaged, and was aware that Caroline was an only child. Learning of her father's death, his fertile brain had instantly conceived the bold plan of filing a forged deed to the land; an instrument dated a year or so previous, executed by some rascally notary, and made to appear regular. Then he had borrowed on it as heavily as possible, the county records substantiating his title. He had not let the grass grow under his feet while accomplishing the crime. And with the other owner, my uncle, distant in Philadelphia, and with but a girl with whom to deal at Cericia, the chances of discovery were few. This undoubtedly was the general line of his operation.

Nor had he stopped here. This little secluded village had apparently impressed him as a suitable place at which to carry on his new plot, whatever it was; and, while he completed the mortgage swindle, he enlisted his associates and set the wheels of this in motion. Likely as not, the Cericia steal was but a minor operation among greater ones that he had under way.

I closed the desk. It seemed, after all, as if the man could not be beaten.

CHAPTER XIII.

A CRY ACROSS THE WATER.

After dinner, Caroline declared that she was weary, and would retire, so I accompanied her upstairs, and, after bidding her good night, went to my own room. On the thick carpet of the hall, my feet made no sound. Just as I was about to enter, Malmesbury walked out of my room.

"Well?" said I.

"Well, what?" he replied, placing his hands on his hips and staring at me.

"I wasn't aware your buffet was located here."

"Oh, it's not—but your box of cigars is," he answered, with nonchalance, and he held up before my eyes three of my fat, choice havanas.

This was a degree of *camaraderie* on his part that made no appeal to my present temper. Besides, my supply of cigars was low.

"You make very free," said I.

"Share and share alike is my politics, after the manner of the freebooters who once beat these seas," he answered, with a grin. "Same for you with my liquor. Any time you wish a drink, don't wait to knock, but walk in and help yourself. A bottle and a jug of water is always on a stand. Fear not. I brought a case of the best with me. Now I must be trotting along, because I must be a happy swain like the rest of you."

I let him go without further challenge. One must overlook some things in this lawless house, or be continually in a quarrel. But that something more than a desire for cigars had taken him into my room I was sure, though when I examined my effects I found nothing missing and nothing out of place. The encounter left me uneasy, with a feeling that his visit portended no good, so that at last I went down again upon the veranda, where I might shake off my restlessness.

Evening gradually thickened into

dusk. Mrs. Belknap, after a first haughty stare, ignored me, and all that was left for me to do was to sit there twiddling my thumbs, or go hunt up the scientist. The latter I chose to do. Descending the slope until I reached the beach, I strolled along it toward Dempster's cottage, but presently was diverted from my immediate purpose by descrying before me, in the dusk, the figure of a woman standing quite still on the sands. I could not see her distinctly. The water of the breaking combers slithered up almost to her feet, giving off a faint whiteness, a soft luminosity, in the early night. Somehow, in her attitude, in her absolute quiet, she seemed an utterly solitary being; and then, as I drew nearer, I saw the person was Sally Brown.

What she might be doing here, and where Malmesbury might be, who had left Webb House to visit her, were the first questions in my mind. When I came even with her, I saw that she was peering at me.

"Good evening," said I.

"Oh, Mr. Masson, it's you!" she exclaimed, in recognition.

"I see you've learned my name," I remarked.

She nodded. "I wanted to thank you for taking my part against Lafe Dodds, this noon, when he talked so insultingly." Then she went on, in a low, hurried voice: "I wanted you to know that I heard what he said, and saw you act, and to feel that I'm grateful."

"Dodds was drunk, and more or less irresponsible," I said. "Perhaps, if he were sober——"

"Lafe's a fool! He'll keep on getting drunk just as often as he can."

Believing the conversation now to be finished, as she remained silent, I was about to make my excuses and pass on to Dempster's, when her fingers clutched my sleeve. Again she was harking over her shoulder.

"Some one's coming—Mr. Malmesbury, probably," she whispered. "He was at the store, bothering me. Then he began to talk with that Mexican, and I slipped away to come here. Move back from the water. I've more to say."

I yielded to her pull on my arm, and retired to a place higher on the beach, where we should be invisible against the dark background of the wood.

True enough, the person was Malmesbury. He went by in the darkness, whistling a music-hall tune, his spirits not a whit dashed by the fact Sally Brown had stolen away from him. I could barely make out the blur of his figure moving along the white edge of the water, and then, as he walked away, going toward Webb House, his lively whistle returned to us more and more distant.

At last I said to my companion:

"What is it you wish to say to me?"

"When Mr. Ratchford came back from Hampden he said you were here, said you were a law officer. I want to ask if it is true? Maybe I shouldn't speak of it, but if you are—— Since doing what you did this noon, if you are an officer, I feel I ought to warn you to be careful of yourself."

"Be sure I appreciate your thinking of my safety," I answered, "but I'm not an officer of any sort. What particular sort of officer is Mr. Ratchford keeping his eye open for?"

"I don't know."

"Is he busy at something to make him afraid of officers?"

"I can't say any more, Mr. Masson. I was probably foolish to come to talk to you at all. Listen!"

On the beach, in front of us, some one had stumbled, and vented his anger by an oath. Engaged as we were in talk, we had heard no one upon the sands. But now, as we remained listening, peering, we distinguished the footfalls of the man; and next, when he came to a halt not twenty paces from

us, I was just able to make out his dim shape. Again he swore to himself.

"Lafe Dodds!" the girl at my side whispered.

The young fellow stood motionless, so that in the darkness I doubted whether I saw him at all. A few stars were beginning to shine, but as yet with little light. From the direction of Webb House there sounded above the surf random notes of Malmesbury's warbling whistle.

Dodds exclaimed aloud:

"Good thing you're home, you long-legged thief, instead of with my girl—or I'd get you."

I felt Sally Brown's hand shake slightly on my arm, while she breathed faster. Her rejected lover, having seen Sally, earlier, depart from the store, then Malmesbury, had followed the latter, believing a meeting between the two was probable. Well, it was I who had met Sally; but then, Lafe, no doubt, was in a poor mood to distinguish between members of Webb House. I grimaced at the thought of shouldering the Englishman's plague.

"I must slip away," the girl breathed.

"He'll hear and discover you," I warned. "Stay while I go and occupy his attention, then he'll not notice your steps when you go."

Her clutch tightened on my arm.

"No, no! He'll try to fight you again! He's been carrying a gun all the afternoon, and bragging he'll drill some one who needs killing. You knocked him down—he means you! Keep away from him."

"Lafe won't shoot me, I think," I said.

"He surely will, Mr. Masson! He surely will!"

"At least, I shall risk it. I'm going, so say no more about the matter. Be ready to start away the instant you hear the two of us talking."

"Very well," she replied, in a resigned whisper, "but I wish you weren't going."

I let her have the last word, for I was ready to act. Circling some distance to the right, I approached him with no effort at silence. He caught the noise of my shoes on the sand, grunted, and demanded to know who was there.

"It's I, Masson. And who's that speaking?"

"Dodds. And don't come too near. What do you want? You and me ain't got any business talking together after fighting."

"Lafe, I'm willing to forget that little scrap, if you are," I said, in a friendly tone. "I was lucky enough to knock you down simply because I'm a better boxer, not a better fighter. You're a regular wild cat in a fight, Lafe, a whirlwind. Listen! You and I ought to be friends, because we've got the same enemies. Those men up at Webb House are trying to finish me, or drive me out of here—and do you know why? Because I'm Miss Webb's friend. Then another thing, I'm on to the fact that they're up to something crooked, and if they knew that they'd cut my throat in a minute. Listen again! I followed Malmesbury out to that old log house on the creek, and was hiding in the brush when they got you. I saw everything."

"You saw those devils with me there!" he burst out.

"Yes. When Malmesbury chased you——"

"And he didn't catch me!" he broke in exultantly.

"No, he didn't. You were too speedy for him. When he ran after you, that Mexican stumbled upon me, stuck his gun in my face, and then tied me up for a while with a piece of fish cord. He wanted to shoot me, but decided to wait till the Englishman returned. I was in the same fix you were, only worse. After a little bit, he went into

the cabin, and while he was gone I managed to get free."

In the darkness, I was unable to measure on his face the effect of my recital. My words had been uttered rapidly, lest he halt me from disbelief, and in a low tone lest Sally Brown should still be by; though I was confident she had obeyed my injunction to slip away the instant Dodds and I began to talk.

"So they got you, too, and you beat 'em out?" he said, surprised into a more friendly mood. "You ain't lying to me?"

"Why should I lie to you? My story's straight as a string. I don't belong to that gang. I'm here to help Miss Webb."

For a little time he was silent.

"Well, if that's so, I reckon you're all square," he said. "She's a good lady, for she took medicine and stuff to eat to my old mammy when she was ailing; and she ain't in with those men, for Corwin took her house away when her daddy drowned—though I don't know for why she's hanging round here yet. If you're Miss Carry's friend—and ain't trying to steal Sally Brown from me, like these other fellows—why, there's no use of me and you fighting any more."

"What I'm trying to learn is the scheme these men are working on," said I, going to the point. "Once I find out, I'll have officers here who'll put them behind bars. I know this much: What they're doing here concerns the boxes and freight they're having Sam Brown haul over from Hampden. I saw them loading a wagon there at the depot."

Dodds broke into a harsh laugh.

"Sam's hauled a heap of wagonloads for 'em. They think nobody knows—but I know. They kept the boxes in the old warehouse, where they thought nobody'd see 'em. But they're gone now—yeh, they're gone."

"They're gone! What do you mean?" I asked quickly.

My pulses began to beat softly. I realized I was on the tip of a discovery.

"Why, this is how," he said. "Sam brought in a load one night, and put it in the old warehouse. Then some other night—maybe a night or two after—they took the boxes away, always in the middle of the night, when everybody was asleep but them and me. I found out, because I was drunk one afternoon, and went to sleep under a boat, and woke up 'bout midnight, and was just going home when I saw 'em working, and thought it funny, and so watched till I made out what they were up to. After that I watched 'em regular. I reckon if they'd knew I was round they'd taken a shot at me. Last night they worked earlier, being there was a fog."

In my eagerness to learn the secret, I drew still nearer to him. I could almost see his face.

"Where did they take the boxes?" I asked.

"Where do you think?" he chuckled.

"How should I know? I don't have any knowledge of Cericia. Where did they take them?"

"They put 'em away pretty well—except I know. I followed 'em one night when they didn't think any one was round. Yeh, I'm the feller that knows."

The knowledge that he, aside from the conspirators, held the secret fed his vanity, and he enjoyed keeping me in tantalized suspense. I would have liked a club in my hand that minute, with which to beat sense into his ignorant skull.

"The old cabin! The boxes are there!" I exclaimed, with an inspiration.

"Nope; not there."

"Then what were the Englishman

and the Mexican doing there?" I demanded.

"Well, I went out to see, followed the Mex. That's how I got caught; but I know that old cabin; a nigger died there, and it's been haunted ever since, people say; so people are scared to live in it. It's empty."

I cast about for another explanation of the removal of the freight. Ah, could it be that Webb House itself could be the storage place? But to this suggestion Lafe returned another negative.

"You meet me here to-morrow night, and I'll show you where they've the boxes," he offered at last generously.

"Why won't you tell me now?" I questioned.

"Nope; to-morrow night. There comes a lantern. It's that seaweed loon, coming down from his house. Maybe he's going out to pull those weeds in the dark. I reckon he's sort of crazy. Some say he cooks and eats seaweed, instead of bread and pork, and wears it under his clothes, next to his skin, to keep off malaria. He's crazy, sure enough—ain't right in his intellects."

This opinion of the scientist held by Cericia folk in respect to his meals and his "intellects," I reserved for Dempster's edification. He would be interested to learn how the villagers conceived his science. He came toward us with his lantern swinging by his knee, casting loops of light at each step, until Dodds and I were brought within its radiance. Dempster saw us, and lifted the lantern to obtain a better view.

"Not fighting again?" he asked, smiling.

"No; we've decided that we have nothing to fight over," I said. "Isn't that the case, Lafe?"

"Yeh. I reckon we won't fight any more."

Dodds looked from one to the other of us. Presently he fixed his gaze on Dempster, whom he regarded with absorption, if not awe. A demented man —for such he considered my friend— is always of more than common interest.

"Lafe is anxious to know if it's a fact," said I, "that you wrap seaweed round your abdomen to keep off malaria. We were just speaking of it."

"Around the abdomen for malaria!" Dempster replied, serious as a judge, "around the neck for colds, around the legs for pains anywhere."

"I reckon I'll be going," Dodds said.

"Don't hurry away," Dempster said.

"And don't forget to-morrow night," I added.

"I won't," said he, and he vanished into the darkness in the direction of the store.

Dempster still held the lantern aloft. A quizzical smile rested on his lips as he looked after the figure of Dodds. But he made no further comment upon my meeting with my erstwhile antagonist, or upon the seaweed medical cures.

It appeared by his statement, after a little, that he was going for an evening ride in his boat on the water. The sea was smooth, the air quiet, the stars beginning to shine, and he inquired if I should care to join him. I quickly assented.

So, with his lantern swinging once more by his side, he led the way down to the spot where his small boat lay keel up on the sand. Removing our shoes and stockings, and rolling our trousers to the knee, we floated the little craft and waded in the warm water until it rode free. Then we leaped in, and Dempster caught up the oars. A few vigorous strokes sent us out through the combers, so that we lay rising and falling on the sea.

But we were not fifty yards from shore when Dempster paused in his stroke, suspending his oars.

"I thought I heard a voice," he said.

We listened. Nothing was to be heard but the soft slide of water along the gunwale and the easy, scarcely no-

ticeable heaving of the sea. Then the wild cry of some man in mortal pain, like a death cry, came ringing over the water from the beach.

CHAPTER XIV.

NIGHT RECONNOITER.

Our boat lifted under the swell, hung for a little, then sank again, while we sat motionless, waiting, with that curious expectation man has, at a sudden cry of agony, for it to be repeated. But night closed over the sea more complete, more empty, than ever; Webb House, to the west, showed lights; the village, eastward, here and there a twinkling lamp; but the space between the beach and the wood glooming behind was absolutely black. We continued to float placidly upon the water, wondering what the eerie call might mean, until Dempster dipped his oars and gave the boat a forward thrust.

"Some negro was frightened by his own shadow," he remarked. "Anything is apt to fetch a yell out of one of them in the dark."

With leisurely, but strong, strokes he rowed the boat farther from the shore, refusing my offer to relieve him, and bending his shoulders to the work. When half a mile off Cericia, whose distant lights gleamed upon the sea, he lifted the oars in, lighted a cigar, and leaned back in comfort.

Gradually the current of the Gulf drifted us eastward until we were even with the village, until we were past it. But all at once, Dempster stirred on his seat. I saw that he was gazing landward.

"There are lights on the beach back yonder," he said.

I looked over my shoulder. True; between the lights of Webb House and the windows of the hamlet, flames went to and fro, now grouping together in one place, now separating, now passing back and forth with apparent aimlessness; but finally all the spots of light stayed at one point, the quarter from which had come the cry.

"Ah! Then something did happen there!" I said.

"It seems much like it. Listen! I can hear their voices."

Distant utterances, and once a shout, traveled out to us across the water, so faint, however, that we could not distinguish tones nor judge their import. That something had happened, something related to the cry, was plain. We speculated on what it might be, and the night, to me, all at once had lost its character of calm.

"Shall we go back?" I asked.

"No use. Whatever has happened, has happened," he said philosophically. "By the time we reached there the people would have dispersed. We'll learn the news, if there be any, when we go back. I'll row a while now."

Taking to the oars, he began to pull in the direction of the current—that is, eastward—rowing with long, vigorous strokes that sent the boat ahead at a lively pace. After an hour, when I remarked that we were leaving Cericia at least three miles behind, he only laughed.

"I like exercise once in a while," he answered. Then he allowed the boat to float for half an hour longer, when he said: "We are going somewhere, and we're nearly there."

Indeed, as he spoke he set again to rowing. At the end of fifteen minutes he rested on his oars and stared over his shoulder before him. At first, I was unable to distinguish anything, though finally I made out a blur upon the water that was scarcely visible in the starlight.

"Shore again?" I asked.

"An island."

I remembered that I had heard there were sandy islands along the beach to the eastward of Cericia.

"Is this where you hunt seaweed at

night?" I inquired, recalling, with a smile, Lafe Dodds' statement about the scientist's night work.

"Not this evening, at least. This is not a case of seaweed," he rejoined. "Now, we must go quietly, Masson. Perhaps we shall discover something out of the ordinary here, and perhaps we shall not; who knows? But silence is safest. I'm not usually curious, but I'm certainly curious about this island—that's why I'm here. You remember the Mexican who landed by the pier and talked with the two Englishmen? Well, I've a notion this is where he hangs out. Come along! We'll see!"

"The Mexican! The man is bad medicine, I think. But I'm glad you asked me along on this voyage," I replied.

"I judged he was bad," said Dempster. "That's why we must move with care."

Exercising considerable expertness, he propelled the boat forward without a splash, and with scarcely a creak of the oars. Our advance slowed; Dempster kept his head turned most of the time. Now and then he halted altogether to listen. But there was no sign of life on the low island that began to loom before us. The sound of waves lapping on its little beach could be plainly heard.

Slower and slower Dempster rowed. He increased the length of his periods of listening. I glanced back over my shoulder in the direction from which we had come, and saw but a single tiny point of light, a lamp in one of the upper windows of Webb House. Cericia seemed very distant, the islet very hushed and lonely. The vague aspect of the latter here in the night had something ominous that I could feel, but not define.

We drifted steadily nearer. Occasionally Dempster assisted our progress by a gentle propulsion of the boat. When we were within fifty yards of the island's head he noiselessly lifted the oars in and stowed them on the bottom.

"How's your nerve?" he asked, speaking guardedly.

"Never better. I'll travel with you as far as you want to go."

A chuckle greeted my words. He himself appeared in excellent spirits, as if he looked on the expedition as a lark. But with my more intimate knowledge of Moreles, with the recollection of the predicament in which I had been at the hidden cabin by the creek, I was more grave. Dempster had something yet to learn of the island's tenant.

His hand on my knee warned me we were about to land, and next minute the keel of our little craft grated on the shingle, slipped forward a short distance on the lift of the following wave, and then stuck. Out we stepped, thrusting our feet into the warm water and seizing the gunwale to draw the boat higher, moving stealthily lest even at that instant ears might be harking and eyes staring through the darkness to see us.

We had reached the beach a short way eastward of the island's head, and on the north shore, where the drift of the current had borne the boat. Across half a mile or so of water I could see the horizontal blur of the mainland, dark in the starlight. Squatting on the sand, to allow our eyes to become accustomed to the surroundings, I now perceived the nature of the islet, a stretch of sand some few feet above high tide, a low, flat bank with a growth of coarse, wiry grass and a scattering of trees.

Dempster drew me into a whispered consultation.

"We'll follow the beach," said he, "where our naked feet will be heard by no one. The other end of the island is where we want to get, about a quarter of a mile away."

"Then you know this place? You've been here before?"

"I've rowed round it in my boat, is

all; even at that, keeping well offshore. It was wise to have one's bearings, you know, before this trip. Through my glass, I made out the tip of a tent yonder at the other end. Well, we'll not plan on leaving calling cards," he concluded, with a chuckle.

Just then an idea popped into my head.

"This is where they bring those boxes!" I whispered.

"You mean the boxes we saw in the wagon, on the way from Hampden? I rather think you're right."

"There've been other wagonloads come," I continued; "counting them all, a good many loads."

"Humph! You seem to have learned considerable in the short while you've been in Cericia."

"Well, I've done what I could," I replied. "This is the way the men worked it—freighted the boxes over from Hampden, bringing them in at night and stowing them in one of the old abandoned warehouses; then, on another night, and at their leisure, boating them here. This is Lafe Dodds' explanation. He has been watching them at it. He had just told me when you came down from your cottage with your lantern."

Dempster, for a moment, remained silent. Then he said:

"If the boxes are here, perhaps we'll locate them. Come! I think we'd better start on."

At this, we set off along the lee of the island, keeping close to the fringe of grass that bordered the beach.

"Go slowly, now," Dempster cautioned, when we were drawing near the eastern end of the island. "The man's hereabouts; at least, it was about here that I located his tent."

Once again we proceeded, with senses alert and with careful feet. Suddenly, as by a signal, we both stopped. A faint glow of yellow light lighted the isle, fifty yards ahead of us, like a soft nimbus. We moved yet nearer. Here and there a tree took shape in the soft radiance, the long blades of grass bending toward the beach could be distinguished.

"The man's camp fire," my companion remarked in my ear. "He is late at supper."

Creeping forward to the screen of grass, we sought to obtain a clearer view of his camp. But a slight rise in the sand just here, a small hummock, interposed.

Dempster touched my arm.

"Listen to him! Listen to the man!" he said, cocking his head to hear.

From the camp there sounded a voice. Moreles was singing, with no heed to guard the noise or to soften his words. He bellowed the measure with reckless indifference to being heard, with harsh, unmusical tones. The song he sang was a Mexican love song. I arose and had a look at him.

Moreles sat by the fire. A bottle was in his hand, a rag was bound about his brow, his head lay tilted back as he sang, the firelight falling bright on his bearded, savage face.

My swarthy friend of the log cabin was taking his ease.

CHAPTER XV.

THE "METAL WORKERS'" PLANT.

There was something unnatural in this scene of a man carousing alone here at night. All the circumstances—the glow of the fire, the desolate character of the place, the expanse of water on every side, the surrounding gloom—produced an atmosphere at once weird and picturesque. Moreles—his figure harmonized with and completed the tableau. Two centuries earlier, he might have been a Caribbean buccaneer, shipwrecked on this strand; and one wondered what dark passions beat in his heart, what obscure currents moved in his soul.

Concluding his song, he set the bottle

down and got to his feet, when he stretched himself, with a yawn.

Then he began to work at something or other just without the circle of firelight. Just where the faintest beams reached, there rested under a tree a dark heap, about which he moved, with now and again sounds of labor.

"What is he at?" I asked Dempster.

"That's what we'll find out. Let us crawl round to the other side; then we'll learn."

"We can't go by way of the beach," said I, "for his fire throws a light on the sands there."

For a little, he studied the lay of the ground.

"Follow me. We'll take to the grass," he stated. "Creep carefully. Slow's the word. No reason why we shouldn't make it without the greaser hearing us. He'll probably be too busy with his work to notice anything."

So, setting off on hands and knees, through the grass, and proceeding with infinite care, we encircled the camp and approached it from the landward side. A good fifteen minutes was consumed in the maneuver. When we arrived at the spot where the dark pile lay between us and the fire, we took occasion to rest. Moreles' figure was now fairly visible, except when it blended with the heap, as he took a step this way, a step that, or bent over or stood erect.

That the dark heap was the freight from Hampden, the secret boxes by which the men of Webb House set such great store, I had already guessed; but what did these boxes contain? Why were they brought here? At what did the Mexican work? These questions, and others, raced through my mind, raising my curiosity to the boiling point and aggravating my impatience.

"Let's get nearer. I can't see a thing here," I whispered to Dempster.

"Very well. But wait till he next makes a trip to his bottle. That will be our opportunity."

It seemed long in coming, though, in fact, the time was short. Moreles finally straightened up, rubbed his head, and, after a period of meditation, walked to his liquor. The instant he turned his back, we took advantage of the chance to go forward, rather more rapidly than was wise, for our passage made a rustle in the grass that I thought would alarm the whole island. Yet the man heard nothing. He lifted the bottle to his lips and drank.

When we were at a spot that I fancied was quite near enough, Dempster kept on creeping. He swerved aside so that the pile intervened, and Moreles was entirely hidden from view, and, instead of halting, increased his speed.

I caught him by the foot.

"This will do. We can see from here," I said.

"Dammit, man, let me be!" he answered, in a rasping whisper, and on he crawled, I following at his heels, mightily surprised, and almost aghast at this extraordinary daring.

We came within twenty paces of the pile; indeed, within ten—by Jove, we were at the base of the very boxes themselves!

And none too soon.

Moreles had returned. I could not see him, but his movements at the neighboring side of the heap next where we lay were audible, and apprised me of the fact.

Before me, on the earth, Dempster sprawled, an eye about the corner of a box to see what he could see, which left me to consider, if in thick darkness I could have been said to consider, the bare soles of his feet. This was highly unsatisfactory. The scientist ought not to have all the fun, so gradually I wriggled myself alongside him.

With a snap, a twig broke under the impact of my body, as I came to rest. Instantly his hand closed in an iron grip on my shoulder.

"You fool! Do you want us murdered?" he breathed in my ear.

"I've a gun, and can murder, too," I retorted.

"Then keep still—or you may need it."

The acute position we were in, and my excitement, did not prevent me from marveling at the singular change that had come over the mild and philosophical scientist. He was another man. But danger produces queer transformations in human beings. Dempster, all at once, had become as bold as a lion, likewise as peevish as a disturbed rattler.

A quarter of an hour passed. Moreles worked on. The rattle of the objects he moved sounded plain, and occasionally there flashed from them a sharp gleam. Apparently, he was engaged in sorting or repacking the contents of the several cases of freight.

I was beginning to wonder how long this would go on, when my companion gradually and noiselessly got to his knees. The Mexican was resting; he remained with hands on hips, his back to us, and seemed disposed to stop for the night. Finally he put his arms above his head and indulged in another long yawn. Even a ruffian, I suppose, grows weary, and must sleep like an honest man. He finally went to the fire, where he sat down and seized on his bottle.

Dempster slid round the corner of the boxes, inch by inch, a desperate advance in which I promptly joined him. No pair of assassins stealing on a victim could have been more cautious or more determined than were we to learn now in what wares Corwin dealt. When Moreles drank, we glided forward; when he lowered his bottle, we were quieter than the shadows in which we lurked; and, fortunately, he applied himself repeatedly to the liquor with intent of rounding out his evening's potations in ample measure.

Well, when he had drained the last drop, and hurled the bottle into the grass, we were beside one of the boxes over which he had worked. Moreles stood and rubbed his cheek. He looked at his tent, then he looked uncertainly toward where we hid. In the matter of resuming his task, he apparently felt a pressing need to go on; it was toss and go in his mind whether or not to finish the job. If he returned, it meant our discovery, which, in turn, meant that Moreles would have a fresh surprise.

He continued to ponder, his mind pointing two ways. Now, if ever, was our chance to learn Corwin's secret. A box, resting on a second, was at my elbow; the lid was off, and, rising half erect, I put my arm over its side and down into its hold. It was only part full of what it contained. My groping hand encountered an object, one of a number, that was smooth and hard; my fingers closed over a round, slender, metal cylinder. A flash of exultation went through me. I knew this merchandise, and, putting one and one together to make two, knew the market for which it was destined. Little wonder these men hid their traffic!

Impulses are nerve reactions, I've heard. Well, I had an impulse. Nothing would satisfy me now but that I should carry home, so to speak, a scalp of our expedition. I got a firm hold on one of the objects, gently lifted it up from its rest—and then our luck, which until the present had continued extremely well, flew away at this rashness. The contents of the box had, by the Mexican's work, evidently been pushed into a loose position so that they were partly suported by my prize; they hung for an instant, and then slid free and rattled into a new place, some of them knocking against the wood, some clashing together. The noise was not especially loud, but to my dismayed ears it might as well have been a crash of thunder.

Dempster choked back an exclama-

tion. That Moreles had heard the sound, too, muffled though it was, was plain by his actions, for he swiftly jerked his head about, came two steps toward us, and then stood listening, with beard thrust out, figure tense, the very image of suspicion.

I slowly lowered my trophy to my side, because there was nothing else to do; because, moreover, I had no intention of now abandoning it. A prize so hardly gained was not lightly to be laid down. Besides, it might come in handy. Dempster started to retreat, backing into me, and, in consequence, I began to withdraw, each of us exercising all the delicate care of which we were capable, and trusting to the darkness to make good our escape.

With suspicion unallayed, Moreles stared fixedly in our direction. His hand crept, little by little, down to his hip, where it remained; then, almost imperceptibly, he edged toward one side, and out of the firelight, in order to come round from behind and take us at a disadvantage. But Dempster and I were not idle. Our crablike retreat at last got us to the corner of the pile where first we had hid. I was just passing about this, when the scientist pressed backward unexpectedly, caught me off my balance, and tumbled me over, so that the object I bore away with me struck with a loud thump against one of the boxes.

Moreles' arm jerked forward, his revolver cracked twice in quick succession, with the bullets thudding into the cases close by us. And then, with a bound, he vanished into the darkness like some ill-favored night bird.

"Get along with you, you clumsy idiot!" Dempster grated out between his teeth. "You've done enough mischief! Move lively, if you want to see Cericia again!"

On this occasion I had no spirit for response, though he himself was responsible for my fall. We were in a ticklish position, and now was not the moment for controversy. If Moreles succeeded in getting us between him and the light, there would be a fresh fusillade of shots, and probably with dire results. So, turning about, therefore, the two of us made our way off on hands and knees, penetrating the grass for forty or fifty paces, and being exceedingly intent just then on covering distance rather than on preserving silence. There we sank prone on the earth.

"What's that thing you're dragging along?" Dempster asked, with his lips to my ear.

"Never you mind. What the devil did you butt me over for, back yonder?" I hissed in reply.

"Hush!" said he.

Off to the left of us sounded a soft, slow brush of feet through grass, barely to be heard. The Mexican had circled, and now advanced on the camp from landward, either supposing his invaders yet crouching by the pile of boxes, or expecting to see them revealed against the fire. At intervals he halted. During one of these pauses I drew my revolver from my pocket in order to be prepared in case he happened on our concealment. In such an eventuality, I did not know what Dempster would do, but for myself my mind was made up. I should beat the Mexican to the first shot. One has no compunctions in swiftly shooting a tiger. Moreles was a human tiger.

Slowly our tracker came closer; by the sound, he was not more than twenty feet away. A long pause ensued. The beat of blood in my temples was like the rapid, rhythmic pounding of a tiny hammer. Once more Moreles advanced until he was but ten feet away; my hand closed tight on my pistol. And again there came the faint rustle of grass, then silence. Against the stars, I dimly beheld his dark figure above us, motionless, inimical, harking with the sharp

alertness of an animal, straining to catch any betraying sound. I could have put forth a hand and almost have touched his ankle.

My weapon was leveled at his breast; my finger was crooked round the trigger. Beside me, Dempster lay still as a dead man. A light puff of wind stirred over the island, moving the grass blades in a whisper, only to cease and leave the silence more taut than before. Moreles never knew that that vagrant breath of air among the trees, had he advanced then but one more step, would have borne away with it his savage soul.

But instead, the step was taken toward the camp. He crept off as he had come, stealthily, and I let my revolver sink down, while I experienced a feeling of physical slackness, of exhaustion, a sense of tragedy just grazed. At my side, Dempster took an immense breath.

"Too near for comfort, that. His toes were almost in my ribs," he murmured.

I rose to my feet. "We'd better go while the going's good," said I.

"Yes. He may presently take it into his head to circle round the beach," Dempster returned. "I would be annoyed if I found him waiting for us in our boat."

"Probably you would," said I, "especially if he proposed rowing us home—dead."

"Take a line to the south, then, till we strike water. Once on the beach, it will be easy going."

Southward we proceeded, therefore, still exercising care as long as we were within range of Moreles' camp, but quickening our pace when well away. Through the scattering of trees we passed at a lively pace, and came down upon the southern beach within five minutes, thence went at a trot along the sand until a narrowing of the island informed us we were approaching its western point. By the flame of a shielded match we soon located our boat.

Just as we were shoving it into the water there came from inland the faint report of a shot. Dempster laughed.

"The fellow thinks he's potting us again. Heave away! Now she floats! Step in!"

With a powerful push of an oar, he forced the little craft out from shore, then seated himself to row.

"And what did you find in the box?" he inquired.

"An explanation," I answered.

"Explanation?"

"Yes; of what Malmesbury meant when he said he was a 'metal worker.' They are all metal workers—Corwin, Ratchford, Malmesbury, Moreles."

"And the particular kind of metal?" he asked.

"Gun metal. I have here on my knees a fine Krag rifle that will never see Mexico."

CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT THE CRY MEANT.

Though it was near midnight when Dempster and I landed at Cericia, Webb House was still brightly lighted, at which I felt some wonderment; for, excepting Ratchford and Malmesbury, who were night owls, the household generally retired between the hours of ten and eleven. Dempster, too, bespoke the fact, remarking that the mansion had the appearance of a house that entertained. Having intrusted the rifle to the scientist, lest the Englishmen should see it, and divine that I had been on a journey to the island, I gave the brilliancy of the dwelling no further thought. I was tired, though in good spirits; in good spirits because the cat was out of the bag so far as Corwin's conspiracy was concerned.

How long Caroline had been standing on the veranda, against my return, I know not, but as I marched up the slope, whistling to myself, she flew down to

meet me. She caught me by the arm, uttered the words, "Don't let them hear you," and drew me away. Both surprised and perplexed, I followed where she led, to a spot some distance off in the darkness.

"What's happened?" I asked.

"Something terrible!" she said, in great excitement. "Haven't you heard? Don't you know? Where have you been all evening?"

As I perceived her nervous state, I became steady.

"I haven't heard anything in particular, and I've been for a row on the water."

"They're accusing you of the deed!"

"Who is accusing me?"

"Every one! All Cericia!"

"Suppose you begin at the beginning, and tell me all about it, Caroline," I said. "I haven't the least notion in the world what you're talking about, nor can I imagine why Cericia should be in a pother, especially in any matter that has to do with me."

"It's about Lafe Dodds!" she exclaimed.

"Well, what's Lafe done?"

"Done! He's done nothing! He's dead—been murdered!"

"Ah!" said I, and I remembered that cry that had come from the beach, ringing over the water.

The news was, indeed, startling. To have talked with the young fellow in the early darkness, to have been with the reckless scamp but three or four hours previous, and now to learn he was dead—yes, it was a shock. An uneasiness at I knew not what began to take possession of me.

"Lafe dead?" I said presently. "Then he must have died very suddenly, for I was chatting with him, on the sands down yonder, just as night fell."

"That's what Sally Brown said, what every one is saying," she responded. "That's why they're accusing you of the murder!"

Caroline was so wrought up over the tragic event that she could not tell a connected story, so I set to work to draw the facts from her as she knew them.

"How was he killed?" I asked.

"Stabbed. And they say it was you, Tom! Of course, you didn't do it—I know you didn't do it—but they all say you did. The whole village is clamoring against you. My aunt and cousin believe it; Mr. Ratchford and Mr. Malmesbury say——"

"Trust them to put in a word where it will count for their interest, the scoundrels!" I interrupted. "Well, go on."

"They're all waiting up for you to come home. Aunt and cousin whispered together, and looked at me as if I was a murderer myself simply because I had been with you this afternoon. The two men have been walking up and down, up and down the living room, as if they were pleased."

"Because they believe they'll now be rid of me," I put in.

"Yes; and from time to time Mr. Ratchford would turn his face toward me, smiling and smiling with his wicked lips. It was like he had his fingers on my throat. It made me shudder. At last I couldn't remain there, I couldn't breathe the same air. I came out on the porch to wait for you and to warn you. Oh, it's all terrible!"

I reached out and caught her hand to comfort her.

"This is no place for you," said I. "Things are growing worse. To-morrow, Dempster shall take you to Hampden, and from there you can go to my uncle at Philadelphia."

Her fingers tensed in mine.

"I will not. I will not run away when you're in trouble. It has all come about because of me! I will not go!"

"But it will be wisest, Caroline, and safest."

"I'll not go," she declared firmly. "I shall stay and help you."

Her whole mind was obstinate; indeed, her very figure was set.

"Caroline, I could box your ears for being so stubborn," I said, "and I've half a mind to!"

"Box away! I'll not move a step from Cericia!" And then, with a trace of offended pride: "I'm not stubborn. I'm only inflexible in doing what is right."

"Very well, I'm resigned," I said. "Tell me how Lafe Dodds passed in his checks."

"How can you speak so!" she exclaimed. "He was stabbed, stabbed to death, with half a dozen stabs in his breast."

"Where was he murdered?"

"Down there on the beach. They say it was where you were talking with him, where Sally Brown says you were talking with him. His body was found by a man who stumbled over it shortly after he had been killed. It lay on the sand, wet with blood, and he was quite dead. Oh, Tom, who could have done it? All Cericia was aroused, and came there, white people and black, and you're to be arrested for the murder!"

"Am I?" I could not help but respond a bit dryly. "Well, well! We'll see about that."

"You don't know all, or you wouldn't make light of it. They accuse you because they say they found proof that you're the man who stabbed him; this in addition to what Sally Brown told. She didn't speak at first, until they found your cap in the dead man's fingers, the cap you've worn several times—and there was blood on it. I can't imagine how he had your cap, or how you happened to be talking there with Sally Brown, in the dark. It's all mysterious, terrible."

The position in which I stood in regard to the murder began to appear not quite so simple. To be sure, I had gone from Webb House bareheaded into the evening, but my cap, if it had got into Lafe Dodds' dead hand, would be incriminating evidence. With that headgear there, and Cericia knowing that I had quarreled with Dodds at noon, by the store, little wonder the ignorant village should settle upon me as the author of the crime.

First of all, I wished to clear Caroline's mind regarding my meeting with Sally Brown.

"Let me explain," said I. "My meeting with the storekeeper's daughter was purely accidental on my part."

And then I told her how I had come to talk with the girl and of my interview with Lafe.

"I knew—I knew in my heart you could not be guilty of murdering him," she said. "But the accusation, the suspense, the danger you were in, the fear that you immediately would not be able to prove your innocence, lay like ice on my heart—and you were away ages!"

"Well, here I am, so far safe and sound, and I shall remain that way. Now come and eat."

"Can you eat now, after all this?" she cried, in wonder.

"I not only can—I'm going to, and you're going to nibble a few crumbs yourself along with me. It will do you good."

"Never! I couldn't touch a bite! Men are a mystery! Why, even to think of eating at such a time! The old saying is right that a man's first thought is of his stomach."

Going to the house, we entered the living room. Mrs. Belknap and Olive at once cast hostile looks at us; Ratchford and Malmesbury halted in their pacing of the floor to regard me in silence—on the face of the one a sinister, triumphant smile, and in the bearing of the other a cold and mocking satisfaction.

"Aha, our desperate character has returned," Ratchford remarked, after a

little. "Pretty tales are flying about Cericia concerning you, my dear Masson."

"I trust you to keep them on the wing," I replied.

"I see you've washed the blood off your hands," sneered Malmesbury.

"Can you answer the same?" I asked quietly; and, as he continued to stand, his long figure resting slack on a foot, his hands in his trousers pockets, and scowling, I went on: "I'm aware now why you were in my room this evening, and of what you rifled it besides cigars. It may not interest your boon companion, our dear Ratchford there, to know why you were in my chamber, but I'll wager a thousand dollars against an English muffin he would be curious if he knew what you and the Mexican were privately arranging against him and Corwin. Am I right?"

Slowly Ratchford turned on his heel for a dark look at the other. Then he came a step toward me.

"What's this? What do you know?" he demanded sharply.

"You've heard of such a thing as honor among thieves. Inquire of your friend," said I, and thereupon I joined Caroline, and we passed from the room.

In the kitchen, she and I sat down to a table. The negro servants, despite the late hour, were not yet away in their beds, but grouped there in discussion, their tongues wagging and their eyes rolling to the whites, a gathering which our entrance hushed. Bidding them all, except the friendly cook, be off to their quarters, I fell with ravenous appetite on the bread and meat and milk placed on the board. Caroline made but a pretense of eating.

Meanwhile, I explained to her the words I had addressed to Ratchford; how I had come on Malmesbury in my room, and my certainty that it was he who had supplied the murderer with my cap, the incriminating evidence. The Englishman himself had not committed the crime, of course. Anticipating what would happen, he doubtless had been careful to show himself about Webb House at the time of the attack and of its subsequent discovery. His infamy was now clear in my mind: On obtaining my cap from my room, he had at once gone to deliver it to his assistant, put his murderous plot in operation, and had then returned home; and the murderer had promptly set out to trail his victim, Lafe Dodds, when the latter left the store.

"Time for bed, Caroline," said I, when I had finished my lunch. "You say you've a revolver; keep it close to your hand. I don't fancy there'll be any trouble, but I want you armed in case anything should happen."

"I'll have it close by," she replied.

On leaving the kitchen, and passing through the dining room out into the broad hall, we found Ratchford there, pacing to and fro. As he perceived us, his head came up, his sardonic smile returned.

"If I'd been invited, I should have eaten a bite myself," he said, with an agreeable air.

"The invitation being lacking, why, you went hungry," said I shortly, "as many a rogue before you, Ratchford, has done."

But he did not lose his composure. He jingled some coins, now with his eye on Caroline, now with it longer on me, until I asked him to stand aside in order to permit Miss Webb to have the use of the stair.

"By all means! I beg your pardon, Miss Webb, for this unintentional rudeness," he replied. "I hope you have a pleasant rest."

She made no answer, but went up the steps noiselessly.

"Well?" I asked.

He grew thoughtful, his brow gathering in knit lines.

"I wanted to ask you what you meant when you said that Malmesbury and

the Mexican were planning something against me."

"You'll have to learn that by your own efforts. What is my word, a supposed murderer's, worth?" I paused for a time to let him speak, if he wished, but apparently he did not wish. "But I'll go so far as to say the two of them are cutting under you some way, somehow, that I don't know. Therefore, look sharply to your business. I'm not giving this information for love of you, be sure of that, but for a reason of my own—but it's true."

His brows still carried a question.

"What the devil are you driving at?" he finally exclaimed. "Tell me something."

I smiled. So far, he had had all the smiling to himself.

"My dear Ratchford, that you must discover," said I.

Whereupon, trusting considerable to the power of a mystery, I mounted the stair to go to my room. The last thing I saw over my shoulder was the lithe Englishman's figure standing in the hall, and his frowning, handsome face gazing upward.

CHAPTER XVII.

CERICIA THE BOLD.

When, after breakfast, next morning, I went with Caroline Webb out upon the veranda, a score or more persons stood in groups not far off on the beach. A number of the men and women were white, the others black, with children of each hanging about them, the elders talking, questioning, gesticulating, and gazing toward the mansion with a suppressed excitement that fed, I doubted not, on wilder and wilder reports.

At sight of me, a louder buzz among them sounded upward. Fingers were pointed, heads craned my way. Some of the people who were not yet quite arrived hurried forward, calling, as they came, to know what was what.

Dempster, walking toward the house, attracted my attention. Regarded as mildly mad by the villagers, he was allowed to pass unmolested; indeed, he was scarcely noticed, and so, mounting the slope, he came to where Caroline and I were seated.

"Good morning, friends. May I join you in enjoying the spectacle?" he greeted.

"Yes; sit here by me," Caroline responded, with a welcoming smile. "But the sight's not a very cheerful one. Those people are acting very foolish. I hope they attempt nothing rash."

"I hardly think they'll try mob violence," Dempster remarked. "In any other region, such a crowd might work up to it, but here their blood is too thin. Of course, Masson, you had nothing to do with Dodds' death; that's nonsense. When I got home last night, I had all the particulars of the accusation from Uncle Jerry, learned the common belief that you committed the deed. The old negro was on his knees, praying for dear life, when I put foot inside the cottage. You've a notion who did kill the boy?"

"Certainly," said I. "A man with a rag round his head, where Dodds evidently got in a blow before he died. By fast rowing, the fellow got home some time before we reached the spot."

"Yes, I think so. But we'd better defer further discussion of the topic; there may be other ears than ours to hear," he cautioned, with a glance at the windows. "Well, Miss Caroline, this all can be nothing else than distressing for you; but there'll soon come more tranquil days, let us trust."

"They will come," she answered, giving an assured nod.

Presently the crowd—some ninety or hundred, all told—stirred and swayed and finally began to ascend the slope toward the house. The folks' purpose clearly was not of the friendliest.

"And I've given food and clothes to

half those women!" Caroline exclaimed, unable to restrain her indignation.

"I fear they come," Dempster replied, "not so much on account of your generosities as for Mr. Masson's delinquencies. Sit quietly, both of you, when they arrive. Let me do the speaking."

At that moment, Ratchford sauntered out upon the porch. He lifted an eyebrow at me sardonically, as if to ask were I ready to accept his terms now that the time for a decision had come. Malmesbury, wearing a grin, appeared behind him. And finally, after first putting forth their heads, somewhat fearfully, to reconnoiter, Mrs. Belknap and Olive ventured out, too, with the gentlemen. There is nothing like a united household to face an enemy.

The mob of villagers trudged upward with no semblance of order, now holding back, now making a quick movement of advance, shouldering together for courage, and endeavoring to preserve an appearance of determination. The white men were to the fore, with their women behind them, while on the flanks and at the rear followed the blacks, the children straggling after, last. The negroes did not count—they were present merely as onlookers, not aspiring to have a voice in matters that alone concerned white folks. To the first rank it was, therefore, that we must give heed.

Some ten feet before the veranda the crowd halted. There was a moment of confusion and jostling before its members grew quiet. Then a man in overalls, and wearing a dirty chin whisker, spat on the ground and said:

"I'm the constable. We want the feller what knifed Lafe Dodds." And again he spat.

Dempster hoisted himself from his chair and wearily walked forward to the edge of the veranda, where, resting a hand on a porch column, he gazed down at the motley pack of visitors. In his tall, lank figure and rugged head, crowned with rumpled hair, there was something superior, commanding.

"What do you want with him?" he asked quietly.

"Want to lock him up."

"Have you a warrant of arrest for him—presuming you mean Mr. Masson, whom you think guilty?"

"Don't need a warrant. I can 'rest a man for a killing without a warrant, I reckon."

Dempster's figure straightened. He pointed a long, bony finger at the speaker, but he did not immediately reply, waiting until growing expectancy and suspense had the constable in a fidget. Then he asked impressively:

"Did you ever hear of such a thing as illegal arrest? Of such a thing as gross malfeasance of office? Of arbitrary imprisonment without *coram judice?*"

The constable ceased to munch his tobacco. His chin dropped, and he gazed in growing dismay at the finger boring at him. Likewise, the other villagers seemed impaled by that finger and those terrible phrases.

"Can't say I have," the constable at last answered feebly.

"That's what will happen to you, what you'll be put behind bars for, my friend, if you proceed without a warrant. I advise you to leave this matter to the sheriff."

"Maybe I'd better send for the sheriff. But this feller killed Lafe!"

"That is yet to be proved. The sheriff, when he arrives, will consider the evidence. But, as for yourself——" And Dempster concluded with a significant look.

In the crowd I had early perceived Sam Brown, and wondered if, at bottom, he were not responsible for this gathering, for it would be to his interest, mixed up with the conspirators as he was, to foment feeling against me. As Dempster had talked, and the constable

weakened, disgust gradually marked his hardened features.

In the end, he growled at the local representative of the law: "He's filling you with cotton. Step up and arrest Dodds' murderer!"

"I ain't going to get in trouble with no courts," came the irritated response. "This gen'man says I can't 'rest him, and he talks like a lawyer."

Brown considered him with contempt.

"He's no lawyer, only a crazy seaweed crab," he stated. "Now, move along, and arrest this man we want."

"'Rest him yourself, if you're so sot on it. You been doing all the talking 'bout getting him locked up, anyway. I reckon I'll wait for the sheriff myself."

A breath of disappointment sounded among the company at the constable's backdown, but against the stand Dempster had taken no one of them had the nerve to act.

"Well, what you going to do? Stand there till your legs start growing?" the storekeeper demanded of the constable.

"I'll go home, I reckon," was the answer.

"And let this feller skip out when he's ready?"

"Maybe he won't skip. I'll write a letter to the sheriff, though I ain't much of a hand at writing." Then, with a sudden hopeful look at Dempster, he continued: "P'r'aps this gen'man will help me write it."

"I'll be pleased to lend you every assistance," the scientist replied.

"That ain't going to keep this man who killed Lafe Dodds here," Brown persisted.

"No; that's true. But perhops he'll remain of his own accord. He denies having killed Dodds, and therefore, naturally, wants to see himself cleared of the charge." Dempster turned about. "Will you stay here until the sheriff arrives, Mr. Masson?"

"Certainly. I have no intention of leaving Cericia. In fact," I went on, "not being the murderer, I wish to remain and see the guilty man brought to justice. These good people will find me here to-morrow, and the next day, and every day after that for a long time. No, I shall not take to my heels."

The scientist once more faced the villagers.

"You've heard what Mr. Masson has said," he stated, "and I know him well enough to be assured that he'll do exactly as he says." Hesitating for a little, he next waved his hand in an indolent gesture toward the village. "Perhaps you wish to wait and see what Mr. Corwin has to propose in the matter—for, if I'm not mistaken, here he comes."

Every head in the crowd swung about to stare in the direction he indicated; and there, true enough, came Corwin, having but that instant emerged from the wood by the Hampden Road, and being rapidly driven toward Webb House behind a spirited span of horses. A slight stir went through the crowd, as if it were of half a mind to break and hasten back to the village; but curiosity to see what the master of Cericia would have to say of the affair at last conquered. They whispered a bit among themselves and stood fast.

Rapidly covering the intervening space, Corwin's vehicle reached the slope, the horses swinging up it without break of speed until the colored driver swung the team to a halt before the veranda with a flourish that sent the foremost of the villagers scattering back from hoofs and wheels.

Corwin, with a half-smoked cigar gripped between his teeth, gazed down at the crowd in a long look and an unmoved face.

"Well, have you all moved into Webb House?" he demanded.

At first, no one answered; then a voice piped, "No!"

"What are you doing here?"

"There's been a killing," the constable

replied, taking upon himself the burden of reply.

"Who?"

"Lafe Dodds."

"Dodds? Never heard of him. Who was he?"

"Lafe lived with his ma in Cericia."

Corwin took a fresh grip on his cigar butt.

"Get down to business," said he. "What's that got to do with Webb House? What are you all here for?"

"We came to lock up the feller what killed him."

"Humph! Who killed him?"

The constable pointed a finger at me. "Him!'

Corwin's face came about, and he regarded me speculatively for a while.

"How about it, Masson?" he asked finally.

"I haven't gone into the killing business yet," said I, "but I'm tempted to begin if they keep up this annoyance."

A faint smile rested for the briefest on his lips; then he once again faced the villagers. But before speaking, he removed his cigar, looked at it, and tossed it away."

"March!" he thundered suddenly.

And Cericia set sail for home.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WE FLEE FROM WEBB HOUSE.

Corwin's coming was like a wind through the house. A new energy succeeded his lieutenants' dawdling; Mrs. Belknap and Olive, too, though they knew not why, were infected by the spirit, becoming restless and expectant; while it reached even to the servants in the kitchen, who manifested a brisk industry.

Within ten minutes after his first step across the portal, the leader was closeted with Ratchford and Malmesbury. Of what passed among them I, of course, remained ignorant. If Ratchford stated his suspicions of his confederate, they were probably discussed, a satisfactory explanation made, and the schism thus healed. At any rate, when, toward five o'clock, I was summoned to the library by the master, so far as I could see, the three men appeared to be acting in harmony; too, the details of their prospective departure from Cericia were doubtless settled, for the trio of gentlemen wore the manner of men who had wound up their affairs and waited but to dispose of my case.

Corwin sat at the table, with Ratchford facing him. Malmesbury lounged in a rocker.

"I see you accepted my invitation, and came to live at Webb House," Corwin remarked, settling back in his seat and considering me with an unwinking regard. His dark face disclosed no feeling—I would have thought no interest, had it not been for the eyes glowing beneath his brows. Between two fingers he held his constant companion, a cigar, from which a line of blue wavered upward. A cigar was the natural complement of the man. A cigarette with such a one would have been out of character.

"Yes, I came to Webb House, but as Miss Webb's guest, which, at the time, you understood was the condition," said I.

Ignoring this reservation, he continued: "You have been properly entertained?"

"Very well, thank you."

"I'm pleased to learn it. There's a complaint on the part of these gentlemen that you've shown an unwarranted interest in our private business."

"Is that an accusation?" I asked.

"You may consider it such."

"Then let the gentlemen specify the particulars on which the charge rests. General accusations and vague complaints are always difficult to answer, and any person can make them concerning any matter without much danger of refutation. Isn't that true?"

He drew once or twice on his cigar.

"Quite true," said he. "One must have something specific to deny. Proceed, Ratchford, with your charges."

Not much pleased with his rôle of prosecutor, the Englishman gave me a scowl.

"The fellow was bally anxious to find out at Hampden, when he alighted there," he stated, "what we were loading in Brown's wagon. That for one thing."

"Is that my worst offense?" I smiled. "Hampden affords few amusements for a man with several hours on his hands. I strolled up the street, then I strolled down it, and the station was the only place that showed signs of life; so there, naturally, I paused. My interest in the wagon was the casual curiosity any man would have in an active object in a village asleep. What next?"

I waited for reply, and Corwin waited. Suddenly, with a look of exasperation on his face, Ratchford straightened on his chair.

"What's the devil's use of this nonsense?" he exclaimed. "I know the cad's here to find out what he can of our affairs, and that's sufficient."

"Well, how do you know it?" Corwin asked. "What has he done? Tell me something definite."

"He's nosed about."

"We seem no nearer the mark." Corwin turned from Ratchford petulantly. "We'll now listen to Mr. Malmesbury."

Of Ratchford's accusations, I had had no fear, since with him I had not compromised myself in respect to the plot; but with Malmesbury it was another matter, for he had learned from the Mexican long before this of my adventure at the old cabin and of my spying. A faint dew came upon my brow. I experienced a sinking sensation at the pit of my stomach. One word from his lips would establish me as an active enemy; but I squared my shoulders and dropped my hand into the pocket where I carried my pistol, determining if, on Malmesbury's disclosure, the three men launched themselves on me I should be ready to fight. But the fellow returned Corwin's words with an indolent wave of his hand.

"I know nothing that Masson's done," he remarked, assuming a more pronounced sprawl and shoving his hands into his trousers pockets, "except to stick a knife into young Dodds' liver."

"Of course, you deny the business?" Corwin asked me.

"I do."

"Very good, Mr. Masson; I've nothing more to ask. That will do, I think."

I was dismissed, but I continued to loiter.

"When am I to have my tract of cabbage land; I'm much interested in that, you know?" I inquired.

"We'll see when I return—if the sheriff hasn't got you." A faint smile accompanied the words.

As I passed out of the room, I heard his voice again, directed to his assistants: "Get your luggage packed at once. Dinner to-night will be our last meal here; later, when it is dark, we'll leave the house. Brown will have a rowboat at the pier ready for us."

My mind was flashing in a whirl of thoughts. For a first thing, there remained with me the marvel that Malmesbury had let go the chance to denounce my activity against the plotters, though I finally concluded by being quite certain of my early suspicion, namely, that he was engaged on some surreptitious affair of his own against Corwin. My immunity in the room I had just left, so far as Malmesbury was concerned, could be explained only by his own need of silence. But it was all baffling. What did he intend against his leader, at what did he work?

More important than this, however,

was the prospect of the whole party's departure. They were flitting this night on their illicit business, and, once on the water, Cericia would have seen the last of their shapes. Cericia—it was of no further use to Corwin; he had wrung it dry. A dozen plans to halt the men, to frustrate their scheme, and to bring down the law on their heads leaped into my mind, each as impractical as the other, until I was left with a sense of my own impotence and a certainty these criminals would get off scot-free.

Particularly was I incensed by the fact I should not be able to play even with Corwin, who had used the property belonging to Caroline and me for his own fraudulent ends. I wanted the man in jail; I wanted to pay him out. And I realized now how unwise I had been in staying at Webb House to unravel the conspiracy instead of going immediately to Hampden to bring about his arrest. My curiosity was responsible for the delay. As for Corwin, he had waited on nothing, had driven his business with dispatch, and now was anticipating the time of his flight by twenty-four hours. It is not pleasant to realize in a game of matched wits that the other has proved himself the better man.

In this state of chagrin, I hastened over to consult Dempster on the chance he might have some suggestion to meet the case.

"There's nothing I see for you to do," he remarked, after I had explained the situation.

"But good heavens, man," I protested, "do you mean we're to stand with our hands in our pockets and watch the scoundrels escape, without trying even to throw a stick between their legs?"

"You and I can't stop them. They're determined men who'll waste no time arguing. I'm afraid that in a clash with Corwin and his crowd we'd come off second best. As a beginning, we should have to attempt to place them under arrest; as a beginning, they would start shooting at once, as they're already outside the law. That would give them a considerable edge, wouldn't it? No, Masson, looking at the matter dispassionately, I think you'd best remain quietly in Webb House when they go. Really, your main business here is to regain the property which Corwin confiscated from Miss Webb and you. Now that the man is departing, you will do this, which should satisfy you."

"Well, it doesn't, not by a long way. I tell you flatly, Dempster, I never hid behind a door in my life when things were stirring, and I don't intend to begin now."

He laid a hand on my arm, speaking earnestly:

"Now listen to me; I'm an older man than you. It's not cowardly to be careful; a wise man doesn't attempt the impossible. You can do no good by acting, and you'll only endanger your life. Be guided by me; stay in the house to-night and leave these men alone."

When we were outside and about to separate, I saw off in the south across the water faint smoke that indicated a vessel.

"Look there! Do you see it?" I exclaimed.

"Yes, I noted it first just before you came. Corwin's boat, I imagine, keeping offshore. It's probably a fast one, for a gun runner needs speed if all the stories are true. Well, I'll accompany you, as it's time for my evening stroll —there are some interesting specimens of seaweed along the western beach."

"Seaweed, ye gods!" I exclaimed, in despair of him. "You go back to your seaweed in the midst of all this business as a milch cow goes to her grass."

"Let me enumerate some of the interesting species I've collected."

"Not on this earth! No eight-jointed

Latin introductions for me. Shoot them at Corwin; perhaps he'll curl up and quit."

"Your words sadden me," he responded.

"They are, nevertheless, spoken from the heart."

Parting from him by the pier, I ascended the slope to the house, while he stalked on along the sands into the eye of the setting sun. I paused to gaze after him—ye gods, seaweed!

Dinner that evening went forward with the same feeling of tension that had marked affairs since Corwin arrived. He ate with a preoccupied air. Ratchford conducted a desultory conversation with the Belknaps, though his mind, too, was elsewhere, as indicated by his frequent lapses into silence. Malmesbury, while more circumspect, did not wholly abandon his raillery. All three men ate rapidly and with slim appetites, for the excitement of departure ran in their veins.

"You're not to be gone long?" Mrs. Belknap inquired.

"Not long, I judge now," Corwin responded politely. "I can't name the exact day of return; still, we trust to put our business through with expedition. Meanwhile, the house is yours."

"That's most kind, dear Mr. Corwin."

"But, oh, we shall miss you all," Olive exclaimed. "It will be very tiresome without any men about." And her eyes dwelt languishingly on Ratchford.

Well, the meal came to an end. Servants placed the men's bags and raincoats in a heap in the hall, ready to be taken to the pier. The sun had just set, Sam Brown was bringing his boat, evening was beginning; the last grains of Corwin's time here in Cericia were slipping through the hourglass.

"Ladies, we three men can still enjoy an hour of your company—until night falls," said the master of the house. "We'll spend it with you, since for some days we'll have no feminine society. Yes, Miss Webb and Mr. Masson, with you also. Let us go outside, where it's pleasant."

Never a more agreeable host. He was first to reach and place chairs for the ladies. It appeared as if in this, his last hour in Webb House, he was bent on exercising the courtesy natural to him and in leaving with us a final memory of urbanity and pleasure.

I do not remember the talk exchanged. I myself was low in spirits, too disheartened by my failure to bring these men to book to take an interest in the conversation, or, in truth, to care whether there was speech at all. Caroline was equally quiet, replying only when Corwin, in an effort to make her one of the party, addressed some remark to her.

Corwin—I since have often pondered the character of the man, transient host of Webb House, as he appeared and as I knew him really to be; so able to divide his relations with human beings for business and for social purposes, so able to rob a person without a qualm in the way of work one minute, and next to enjoy with relish the companionship of his victim.

The time for the men to take their leave was drawing near, when Sam Brown came up the slope before the house. At the edge of the veranda, he stopped.

"Sorry to break in on you, but thought I'd better let you know there may be trouble here," he said. "Wanted the ladies to know it so they'd be ready."

"Well?" Corwin asked.

"The men have been drinking—it's over the killing, and they're after this feller they wanted this morning. They weren't primed then, but it looks like they are now."

Corwin let his eyes rest on me for

a moment, then turned back to the speaker.

"I'll not have the villagers annoying the ladies," he said in an even voice.

Brown shook his head.

"I don't know what you can do about it. When men are drunk, they're liable to tear things up. They're starting from over town now, that's why I came up to warn you."

A look toward the village furnished the evidence to support his words. Light enough was yet left to see, though indistinctly, a crowd of men moving from the row of warehouses in the direction of Webb House. We were all silent. Olive Belknap stole a scared glance at me.

"They shall keep out of the house," Corwin said.

"I don't know; I don't know—but I reckon they would if they had this man," Brown replied.

We had all come to our feet. Caroline drew close to me, and I felt her fingers tighten on my arm. Corwin turned slowly about so as to face me; the inevitable cigar burned between his fingers, his features wore their usual calm.

"Mr. Masson, it seems that you alone are concerned in this affair," he said.

"Which means?" I inquired.

"Webb House must not be disturbed. Webb House, therefore, regrets to lose you as a guest."

"Ah, we both depart, then, at about the same time," I replied.

"It would appear so." He shrugged his shoulders as if that concluded the matter, so, too, presently did I.

"I'll relieve the ladies from the danger my presence might incur."

"Thank you, Mr. Masson. I might add"—his lips shaped themselves in a faint smile—"that the back door offers a convenient road of retreat if you have a notion of making an escape."

"Any door is a door when one's in a hurry," I laughed lightly, "and it opens on the woods at the rear, which, in turn, lead to Hampden. Accept my apologies for this abrupt withdrawal, but time presses and Hampden is far. Good evening."

The Belknaps' bewildered gaze, Malmesbury's grin, Ratchford's evil smile, and Corwin's unwinking regard dispatched me on my way. Of Caroline I have said nothing for the very good reason that I immediately discovered her at my heels, and when I emerged at the rear of the house she, too, flew out at my side. The servants were watching us in wonder, so without a word I led her toward the wood. Presently, Olive Belknap ran round a corner of the house, where, with a hand holding her skirts, she stared incredulously after us. Then Malmesbury appeared. He waved a hand.

"Happy days, old top!" he called.

Without making answer, I caught Caroline by the hand and led her into the wood, where, when we were quite hidden in the shadows, we stopped. Neither of us wore a hat; we were as we had risen from the dinner table.

"If we're going on, we'd better start at once," she urged, a little out of breath. "Those drunken wretches from the village will presently be bursting in here—and, besides, it's miles to Hampden."

"But we're not going to Hampden," I replied.

"Not to Hampden! Why, that's where you said you were going."

"To be sure. It was necessary to mislead our friends back yonder in order to mislead the would-be lynchers when they come, for some one will kindly give them the word. Yes, the mob will come here and will beat up the wood, and some will race up the road to cut us off. But they'll not lay hands on us, for we shall not leave Cericia. However, we must get somewhere that is safe."

That would be the spot the angry

villagers would be least likely to suppose us at, and I had already chosen it. Still holding her hand, for the wood was dark with falling night, I drew her westward a distance among the trees, and then bent back toward the sea until we walked forth upon the beach. Several hundred yards west of Webb House, the place seemed secure from searchers, danger of discovery each minute less with the thickening dusk.

We peered and harked toward Cericia until we were wholly assured no one came. And even then we continued to stand quite still, moved by inexpressible feelings, a little depressed by the sense of being fugitives, with a long silence between us.

"Tom, I—I couldn't let you go alone," Caroline said at last, with a low quaver of her voice, while I felt her hand tremble in mine.

And then somehow my arms were about her, and her head on my breast, and, despite the darkness and despite all danger, it seemed to me as if heaven opened up. The wood was like a benediction, the sea along the beach the music of my own soul.

"Caroline! Caroline!" I murmured. "I'm not worthy of you, I don't deserve such happiness, but as God is good I love you beyond any love ever dreamed. My heart is so full, dearest girl, it seems as if it would burst. From the first minute I saw you, something deep down in my being was aware that I should love you and love no other, win you or win no other; and yet I felt as if it would be a profanation to dare have so great a happiness as your heart and your love. Ah, sweet, these men are nothing now, Cericia is nothing now, the world nothing—just to have your love and let me in turn pour out my love to you, that is all, all!"

"Sweetheart!" she whispered.

Her arms crept about my neck, and her lips joined mine. Along the sands the roll of the sea was like the note of some huge organ marking the consonance of our united hearts.

CHAPTER XIX.

LOVE—AND OTHER MATTERS.

Night was resting on earth and sea. We moved farther out upon the beach, where we could have a view of the water before Webb House, and presently there came to us the distant sound of voices, exclamations, far-off calls of farewell. Corwin and his two lieutenants, with coats and luggage and schemes, were rowing away into the darkness.

Of the villagers we heard nothing, but I was sure they had been informed of my departure and my supposed start for Hampden, since little did the men I had left on the veranda care that I might swing from a rope, and now probably the drunken raffle were seeking far and near to take me.

For the present, at least, we were safe. Caroline was content to trust me, to solve our difficulties, and was happy in the present—aye, sure that now, since love was ours, all was well. And in truth we seemed in the center of a great peace which made aught else appear unreal, far away, and of a different world.

We moved slowly forward toward Webb House, now advancing a few steps, now halting to exchange the questions, the confidences, the faith so dear to lovers. Coming to the tree trunk embedded in the sand where we had retreated on Mrs. Belknap's early insult to Caroline, the latter said:

"Let us sit here again. Here you first told me who you were and why you had come—it will always be a spot sweet to me."

"And to me, for already I loved you," I answered, caressing her hand.

"Sometimes I used to come here alone in the first days after father's

death," she said, "to look at the sea and to believe his spirit was near me. The house was lonely without him, and I was downcast at the thought of my misfortunes. Mr. Corwin came, my aunt and my cousin quickly healed their sorrow, and began to cultivate him; likewise Mr. Ratchford and Mr. Malmesbury, who soon arrived. It was home no more. Strangers were in my father's place. But here at this old tree I escaped them; the sea gave me comfort and carried my thoughts back to happy days and renewed my courage. Seeing how vast the ocean was, how tireless, how strong and steady with purpose, I felt surely some Kind Power was behind the world's happenings working with design. It gave me the hope that I, too, was being watched over."

"You brave heart!" I said, softly pressing her hand.

I looked toward Webb House. Its shelter was not for us this night, for should we attempt secretly to steal into it and to our chambers and during the entry be seen by a servant, our betrayal was certain. There was but one course to pursue: to borrow Dempster's cottage for Caroline, a favor the scientist would only too gladly grant. He and I could pallet down on the porch.

"Are you tired, sweetheart?" I inquired.

"A little bit, but I'm more happy."

I explained to her my plan for use of the cottage, to which she gave ready assent, but she demurred at going there now and cutting short our first evening of happiness. She said she wished to make the most of it, to make it endure as long as possible, to be with me every minute she could. Whereupon, I took her cheeks between my hands and paid her in kisses word by word.

"Why can't we go on the water; it is hours to bedtime yet?" she asked. "Just think, we've never been together rowing—and I love the water. Often I used to go out on it by myself so as to have it on every side about me, and then gaze down into its deep currents and imagine the unknown world there. How wonderful the sea is—never idle, never at rest—and at times how terrible!"

"Yes, let us go—a row is the very thing," said I, rising. "I know exactly where Dempster has his boat beached; we'll wet its keel for him."

"Shall we not be seen if we go toward the village?" she asked doubtfully.

"Not in this darkness and if we move quietly. Come, it's but a little way past the pier, lying on the sand. If we should encounter any one, we must pass on without speaking."

Fortunately, every one seemed indoors, or at least no one was abroad on that part of the beach where we walked, for our advance was without collision. The lights of Webb House were burning brightly when we skirted the slope, before which we paused long enough to catch the subdued tones of Mrs. Belknap's and Olive's voices as they talked while sitting on the veranda to enjoy the evening air.

Caroline and I moved on in the darkness. In Dempster's house I saw no lamp in the window, by which I knew he had walked far up the beach. In the village faint lights showed here and there. By the store and the old warehouses seemed a stir with occasional calls, and once from the edge of the wood, nearer, came a shout. The hunt was not yet finished, though it was likely the searchers were wearying of their task, which, in the night, promised no result. Some had already returned to Brown's, others probably were returning.

"The boat is hereabouts," I said to Caroline, when at about what I judged to be the spot. "This is near the distance it lay from the pier, and we are

just before Dempster's cottage. Look out that you don't trip over it."

Putting forward a hand this way and that, and finally striking a few matches, I succeeded in locating it, bottom up and with oars stowed underneath. A small boat, I had no great difficulty in righting and shoving it down to the water. When its stern floated, I assisted Caroline aboard, waded with it farther out; then, giving it a strong push to meet an incoming swell, had it free, and I leaped in.

"I can breathe easier now," Caroline said, "for it was near there somewhere that boy was murdered—and I kept thinking of him. It was creepy."

"Especially with the reputed murderer standing by you and Dodd's blood scarcely dry on the sand."

"Don't—don't, Tom! I'm covering my eyes."

Instantly I could have cut my tongue out for such brutal speech.

"Forgive me, Caroline," I pleaded. "I'm a wretch even to mention such things. I was thinking of those drunken fools yonder who've been seeking my life, and my temper got away for a minute."

"Neither of us will speak any more of it; that's best—only I'd like to know who killed him and how he came to have your cap in his dead fingers."

I was now rowing steadily and putting my muscle into the oars, so for a time I made no reply. My first inclination, too, was to evade her question; but, recalling how whole-heartedly she had abandoned herself to my cause and given her love to me, I resolved that henceforth and always there should be no secrets between us.

"Malmesbury stole the cap from my room," I explained, "and gave it to the Mexican who killed Lafe Dodds and then placed the headgear in the boy's hand in order to incriminate me. It's simple when one knows all the facts."

"How fiendish! And yet it's what I suspected from your words to him about his being in your room, but I wasn't clear how the cap was found there." And after a brief period of reflection, she continued: "It gives me a shudder to think of that man Malmesbury planning this crime against you and then coolly eating at the same table. He was even more wicked than Ratchford. Well, I'm glad they're both gone and I hope never to see or hear of them again."

So half an hour passed. As throughout the ages and under the same jeweled sky lovers have talked, thus we talked—but those words are sacred. Cericia was forgotten; save for us two, the world ceased to exist—save for us, with the soft lilt of the water about our boat.

Those golden moments closed when she chanced to remark that I must have been here on these very waves last night when rowing with Dempster.

"Were you thinking of me then, I wonder?" she mused.

I was in something of a quandary to keep within the strict letter of the truth.

"Well, yes and no; part of the time and part of the time not," I responded carefully. "When we were floating and not talking, I thought of nothing else, but later, when we became involved in a sort of adventure, I'll be honest and say I did not have time. Things about then happened too rapidly."

"What things?" she demanded, with quick, kindling interest.

"Things over yonder—Dempster and I were conducting a private investigation."

"But you tell me nothing! Where do you mean by over yonder? And what investigation? Tom, from now on I expect you to tell me everything to the tiniest detail that ever happened to you."

"Everything!" I gasped in dismay.

"Never you mind that," she affirmed.

"But you haven't told me yet where over yonder is."

"It's an island lying east of us."

"Oh, I know the one you mean, a low, sandy spot. I've sailed round it and been on it several times. What did you find there?"

"For one thing, our Mexican friend Moreles," I stated, "and for another, the freight Corwin had had hauled here secretly from Hampden."

Dim as was the starlight, I saw her figure straighten under the impact of some thought.

"Oho, that's where the three of them rowed to-night!" she cried. "And—and now I understand! From there they will sail to wherever they're going."

"Wise little girl, no one need tell you how much two and two make," I laughed.

Without saying more, she began to look ahead toward where the island might be. She absently tucked away a straying lock, and continued steadfastly to gaze thither. As the minutes drew from one to another, and she maintained her fixed attitude, a premonition of something unpleasant about to happen grew in me.

"It isn't far from here," she murmured at last thoughtfully, "and we've already come a considerable way. And it's quite dark. And you're certainly not tired yet with rowing."

"It's been a very fatiguing day for both of us," I promptly declared, my dark foreboding having been realized.

"And we wouldn't be seen. And if you rowed carefully, we'd not be heard. And we need not go too close. And it's still early. And——"

"And you want to go there," I interrupted, coming to the point.

"Yes, I do."

"No place for you there to-night; we must stay away. I might at a pinch risk my life among those wolves, but I'll not risk yours." My words were uttered with firmness and finality.

"Pooh, we'll not be among them; we'll sit in the boat just where we can see what they're doing, and go no nearer."

"Never! I'll not lift a finger to row you there," said I.

"And after a short look at them we'll come away. I want to see with my own eyes what's going on there."

"I'll tell you all about it and——"

"With my own eyes I want to see it," she repeated inflexibly.

"But——"

"We're going, Tom; now don't argue any more. See, I'm kissing you, kissing you twice."

Speech, of course, was out of question at that moment, but when I was able to open my lips, and I saw by the starlight her dancing eyes, her eager face, I burst out:

"If the devil didn't make women, then Adam never ate an apple!"

"Well, maybe he did make them; I don't care. Now here are your oars; shut your hands on them. And you're certainly a fine rower, Tom, so much better than any man I know, never splashing, and scarcely making a noise and getting through the water so fast when you want to. There now, pull!"

Her persuasion perhaps was not altogether the cause of my yielding. Privately, I, too, had been making eyes at the island. A burning desire was in my breast, a keen yearning against my better judgment, a thirst only the more pronounced because of my failure to balk Corwin, to see the men's departure and view the finish.

"Caroline, would you turn me from my duty?" I asked severely.

"Yes—and please begin rowing at once."

With an air of resignation, I pulled a few strokes.

"I'm cowed," said I. "I see how it

will be in our house, now that you've assumed the trousers."

"Ha, you don't fool me a bit, young man. You want to go as badly as I do. Row on and save your breath."

Thus it was we set off for Moreles' Island.

Another half hour brought us near. Once in that time I imagined I perceived, facing the west as I did in rowing, the dim, ruddy glow like a cigar end or a dull red lantern which Caroline and I had seen earlier in the evening. But it was only for an instant, and I believed my eyes had tricked me.

An exclamation from my companion caused me to rest on my oars. Looking over my shoulder, I beheld the vague outline of the island just before us, and, farther away, at its opposite end, lights that appeared to float upon the water, and on land an obscured glare that betokened a rousing bonfire.

"Those lights there are the ship," I said.

"And some are moving between!" she exclaimed in excitement.

"They're driving the work."

"Go nearer; I can't see a single thing!" she replied impatiently.

"A dozen pulls, no more." When they were made, I shipped the oars and moved to a seat beside her. "We must keep silent now. After we've stayed a bit, we must go, for we must take no chances."

Her form nestled closer to mine, and, hand in hand, we sat watching the lights, whose gleams flickered to us upon the swells. How long we remained unmoving I cannot say, possibly ten minutes, possibly fifteen. Our craft must have drifted steadily toward the island's point during the interval; but, absorbed in the strange night appearance, I noticed neither the forward motion nor the gradually increasing sound of the water on the island's beach. When, all at once, I started up we were at the island itself. I moved to seize the oars and to stem our advance, but a roller washed us ahead. We shot forward, our bow grazed sand, then stuck. We were on shore.

"Oh, oh, are we here!" Caroline exclaimed aloud.

"Heavens, hush! Don't speak, some one might be about."

She gazed round at the darkness.

"I see no one," said she confidently.

"Caroline, you must not talk!" I commanded, low. "Even if you see no one, still he might be here. Now sit still while I step out and push the boat off."

Thereupon I put my already soaked shoe into the water. We had come on the beach, I discerned, somewhat eastward of the point and on the south side. Leaning forward and seizing the gunwale, I gave the boat a strong push outward; it did not stir. I pushed a second time, and still it remained stationary. So, shifting to the prow to obtain a better position, I reached down my hands to grasp the bow, but they did not close on wood. Instead they shut on another pair of hands gripping the boat.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SCIENTIST IN A NEW ROLE.

The hands were instantly withdrawn, and next I felt the muzzle of a pistol pressing against my ribs, while a rough voice ordered:

"Stand where you are—and tell that girl to get out of the boat!"

Under the persuasion of the weapon, I felt no inclination to take issue with my captor. I bade Caroline step forth, which she did without protest, and, in spite of wet feet, groping her way to me.

"What has happened? Who is it?" she whispered.

"Stow that talk and tell what you're

doing here!" the man beside me growled.

"We drifted ashore while boat riding; it was accidental," I explained.

"Well, accidents won't get you off, or anybody else, to-night. Pull your boat up where it won't float off, and then come with me. Don't dry to draw a gun or work any funny business if you don't want trouble."

I made the boat safe, as he commanded, then said:

"We're not looking for trouble, and we don't wish to interfere with anybody. You seem to think we're out to smash something. A man and a girl are not very likely to be desperate or to work any damage."

"The boss will say as to that when you get to him," was his reply.

As he finished speaking, there came a call from a companion guard some fifty yards along the beach, who wanted to know what had happened. Our man responded by informing him that he had caught "a couple of night birds," whereupon the other came forward to the spot. He struck a match and held it before us.

"A man and a skirt! What d'you know about that?" he exclaimed. "Where did they come from, Jack?"

"Just floated in like a pair of turtles. Come along with me while I take 'em to camp."

And so off the four of us started.

The presence here of the pair of sentries showed that Corwin, at this final hour of his coup, was taking no chances. As little as was the likelihood any one would land on the island, there was yet the bare risk some one from Cericia, sailing on the water, might behold the unwonted spectacle of the numerous lights, investigate, carry back word of the mystery, and pass it on to Hampden. In forty-eight hours rumor of the event might be in Pensacola, in Mobile, in New Orleans; and the Federal authorities, seizing on it, could dispatch a fast boat to pursue the gun runner and warn by wireless the American cruisers on the Mexican coast to intercept it. At any rate, his fingers had closed on Caroline and me.

As our little party of four proceeded eastward on the beach, she clung tightly to my arm. I sensed that she was a very scared, a very penitent, and a very unhappy girl, so I assured her with a quiet word that all would end well, though feeling far from certain myself that such would be the case. Our inquisitiveness had resulted in its logical outcome, but I determined to wear a good face.

Fortunately I had not been searched and relieved of my automatic pistol, which, if worse came to worst, would enable me to put up a defense and to assist Caroline's escape. Moreover, in Corwin I placed hope of decent treatment; though unscrupulous, he was still a gentleman, and I trusted that he would see us as we were—a pair of foolish, harmless, fugitive lovers.

At the end of ten minutes, we arrived at the far end of the island. A great fire was going to illuminate the beach and the place of landing. Off a quarter of a mile or so loomed the vessel, lights upon her side, her shape dark and indistinct in the starlight. Between it and the spot to which we came rode other lanterns that served, as I saw when they presently drew in, a scow improvised of two ship boats and a platform of planks laid on them. Lines to the vessel and to shore moved it to and fro like a ferry.

Over the last stretch of sand we tramped and up through the fringe of grass to the fire. For a little time we stood unobserved while one of our guards went to find the leader; watching the work going forward as only work does under a taskmaster's lash or with a captain's promise of liberal reward—and this haste, I imagined, contained something of both. Half a

dozen men were lugging cases to the water's edge, which others had brought from inland to the fire; others hauled at the scow's cable; occasional commands and occasional panting oaths sounded over the place, and even from the distant ship there traveled faint shouts and the water-borne murmur of industry.

Directly, Corwin came striding toward us. He halted before us, the firelight falling full on his face and figure, and stood restlessly beating knee with a switch he had plucked from a bush.

"What's this! Why are you young fools here?" he asked sharply.

"Not because we want to be," I answered. "We were rowing on the water because there was nowhere else for us to go. Then, first thing we knew, we drifted on the point of the island and were captured by your men."

"Well, you're here where you've no business to be."

His eyes fastened on Caroline, who, though continuing to cling tightly to my arm, nevertheless courageously returned his look.

"You're right. Girls, at least, are fools, Mr. Corwin," she said, with a quaver of her voice. "We dared not go to Cericia, and so we kept on rowing, and at last saw these lights. I was curious to know what they meant, and made Mr. Masson come nearer, though he said they were none of our business, and, next thing, we bumped into the island. It was all my fault."

"No, no, Corwin; I'm responsible," I hastened to state. "I was the one who wanted to learn what was going on; Caroline is an innocent party."

"Tom, I made you come!"

"Both and neither of you appear guilty," he said in a dry tone. "It doesn't matter. You're here and will have to be taken care of."

Once or twice more he switched his knee. Then he turned his head to give an order to a group of men who had just emerged from the darkness bearing a box, coming from the direction where I knew Moreles' camp to be

"I thought you started for Hampden," he said, giving his attention to us.

"We wished the mob from town to think so," I explained, "but we had no such idea; those fellows would have caught us. Instead of going, we circled back to the beach west of Webb House, and when it grew dark we rowed out upon the water, believing it the safest place."

"And we'll go straight away from here now and not bother you at all if you'll let us," Caroline added, with the eagerness of one wishing to be very good.

A shake of the head was his answer.

"Not until we've lifted anchor. Though, in all probability, you would not go back to Cericia, still when you're here I have you under my eye. I can't spare a man to watch you, so keep at my side." And then to the guards who had brought us: "Go back to the point—one of you should have remained there."

We were now in the singular position of being at once prisoners and spectators. The work went on apace, the cases coming from the Mexican's camp to the beach, where they were loaded on the scow. With the distant ship at its mooring, with the ceaseless roll of combers on the island, the flare of the huge bonfire, the night, the eerie surroundings of trees and sand and sea, the shadowy figures of sailors moving to and fro with their burdens, the crash of boxes heaved upon the scow, the shouts, calls, and sudden silences, lights gleaming on water, the haste and fever of the work, we might have been gazing on some weird, piratical scene that had been staged in these seas two centuries before. Indeed, in these men was not the fierce and lawless spirit of those old buccaneers once more revived?

Some thirty minutes passed. Most of the freight had already gone aboard the steamer when Caroline and I arrived, as I learned when Malmesbury came up during the loading of the scow to consult Corwin. He wore no coat or vest, and his collar was off. He was wiping perspiration from his face.

"How much is left?" he inquired, looking in the direction of Moreles' camp.

"The next trip will be the last. How is the tackle over yonder working?"

"Well enough. Who the devil is that with you!" For he had just got sight of Caroline and me a little to the rear of Corwin and in his shadow. "Hanged if it isn't Masson and lovely Caroline again! Come to see us sail away to foreign parts. I say, charming of you both, don't you know, especially of you, dear Miss Webb. I thought the pair of you'd be playing—what d'you call it?—Babes in the Woods. Didn't cut and run, after all."

"We're still on hand," I replied.

Corwin, apparently indifferent now to everything but the success of the departure, made no move to check the other's speech.

"Well, these be busy times, comrades, and I must be going. When I reach the ship and tell Ratch you're here, he'll foam at the mouth to have missed you, he's that hospitable. By the way, Caroline, *mon ami,* better throw Masson overboard and sail with us. Ratch and I will fight it out on deck with knives to see who has you. Won't, eh? Alas, I'll have to seek another girl in another port."

While he talked, Caroline had pressed against me for protection, staring at him in fear and horror; and little wonder, for with his disheveled hair, the mocking grin on his long horse face, his hands on his hips, and his satyr bearing and the words that fell from his lips, he was both threatening and repulsive. Our situation was such that I dared not for our own safety resent his speech. We had ventured into these creatures' den and must therefore take the rough with the smooth.

Corwin made a gesture toward the scow.

"Your work, Malmesbury," he said shortly. Whereat the Englishman, after a final fleer at us, moved off.

He had gone but part way toward it when a burst of shouts and cries sounded from the ship, which, in spite of the diminishing effect of distance, carried so different, so startled, and fierce a note from the previous movement, that we all were attracted by it.

"What's that racket?" Malmesbury exclaimed, halting.

Corwin did not immediately answer. He stood regarding the dim ship, while he continued to listen. The Englishman came a step or two back.

"A packing case slipped out the sling and smashed some beggar, I judge," Corwin said at last.

"That may be the cause," Malmesbury replied.

"You can learn when you go over with the scow."

Another muffled outburst of noise traveled over the water to our ears, punctuated by angry yells, choked cries, oaths, then several shots in staccato.

"A row—something's happened!" Malmesbury said quickly. "Ratchford has let his gang of wharf rats get out of hand and had to use his gun."

"The captain and mate were with him and the men were sober," Corwin returned. He stood beating his switch on leg, plainly disturbed by the mysterious occurrence.

"Well, all seems quiet now," said the other. "Bullets bring raffle of that sort to their senses. Ratch should drop one or two more to lengthen their memories. I wish I were there."

That it was good for some one he was not on board I saw by the murderous look on his face; he unquestion-

ably would have driven home the lesson that mutiny was an unprofitable business on this craft.

We were yet standing and staring at the ship, where silence had been as suddenly restored as it had been broken, when a second surprise came in the form of a brilliant red flare that shot up at the ship's rail, bringing out in crimson relief the boat's deck and funnel and spars. The unexpectedness of it, the uncanny glow and specterlike appearance of the vessel, the inexplicable meaning of the phenomenon, held us immovable.

"The game's gone wrong somewhere," Malmesbury presently cried in a hoarse voice.

"Then we'll right it," Corwin said. "I'll spread-eagle the curs on their own deck and give them an hour of a rope's end."

"Shall I call up the men here?"

"Yes—and break open a case of guns."

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth, however, when a whistle shrilled clear and sharp in the darkness behind us, answered instantly by a second farther inland, and by a third still more distant toward Moreles' camp.

We whirled about. Four men who had just come into the firelight carrying a box halted in doubt, at last lowered their burden, and peered off where had come the blast.

"They're all around us," Malmesbury said, showing his long teeth in a snarl.

Corwin made no response. The switch snapped in his hand.

Out of the night came the rush of a dozen men, springing forth into the bonfire's circle of light like apparitions. Malmesbury swung about and ran toward the scow, whose workmen had clambered aboard and were frantically endeavoring to work the cumbersome float offshore.

Astounded by the rapid succession of events, and at a loss as to where they left Caroline and me, Corwin's prisoners as we had been until this minute, I instinctively drew her against my side for protection and clutched my pistol. Corwin took a step this way, then that; the sailors at the box started to flee. But so unlooked for had been the attack and so swiftly executed that before they could make off our companion was seized, the men caught, and the scow overrun. And Caroline and I were roughly grasped and gathered in with the rest. Pistols were everywhere about us, silent, determined men holding us in a ring. From inland came the report of a shot, another, then three or four in quick discharges, after which all was quiet and there was only the snapping of the fire and the undisturbed roll of the surf.

I saw that the men guarding us were not mutinous sailors from the vessel, but strangers in uniform, which struck me as being curious. Uniforms seemed incongruous on this lonely, sandy haunt of gun runners. For the truth of what had happened did not penetrate my confused mind.

One of the circle placed a whistle to his lips, blowing three blasts. A similar answer sounded from across the island, and the man put away his whistle. The affair was over, camp and conspirators captured.

"What is it? Who are they?" Caroline whispered to me, terrified.

"I don't know. They—wait, I believe they're officers. Yes, they're revenue officers. I recognize their uniforms now. Don't worry any longer, dear, for we're in safe hands at last."

From out the darkness presently appeared a fresh contingent of men coming toward the fire. They resolved themselves into captors and captives, the latter being pushed into our group, who proved to be sailors that were taken while carrying boxes to the scow. One or two of their number had failed

to be captured and had escaped in the night. Those who joined us had been overpowered only after a fight, the recollection of which kept them sullen and cursing among themselves.

I looked across the water toward the ship. The flare was dying down, the sea about it was no longer dyed a crimson hue, funnel and spars were again invisible. The purport of the red light, as well as the meaning of the cries and shouts that there preceded its appearance, was now clear. It was a signal to the land forces that the boarding party, which initiated the attack, had mastered the crew and taken the vessel.

Soon new voices were heard coming from among the trees. There was a swish of feet through grass, and directly another body of men moved forward into the firelight—the last of the prisoners with guards, four of the crew who had been rounded up at Moreles' camp.

When these were added to us captives, the herd of us was moved nearer the fire for examination and search. Curious eyes among the revenue men looked at Caroline.

"Does this woman belong with you?" an officer asked Corwin, who already had been designated as the leader.

"No," said he.

"She's in it at least," was the grim reply.

Here a man whom I had not observed before stepped forward.

"No, she's not one of them," said he.

The voice rang strangely familiar. I bent to have a better look at him, but amid the shadows could not distinguish his features. By the consideration shown by the revenue men, I guessed him to be the chief of their party. He came yet nearer, removed his hat, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. I gave a start. I could not believe my eyes.

"You, Dempster!" I cried.

"Yes, this is the seaweed I've been after," said the scientist.

For he it was.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN ISLAND'S NIGHT MAGIC.

After a word or two with us, Dempster gave his attention to the business in hand. A flare similar to the one used on the ship was set off on the beach to signal the pair of revenue service boats, fast motor cruisers, which had brought Dempster's party of men and which lay somewhere off the western end of the island. The dull light like a cigar glow that Caroline and I had seen first in the late dusk and again just before we were taken by Corwin's sentinels was a bull's-eye of one of these uncovered for a moment while speaking its companion. Immediately the beam of a searchlight replied, lamps flashed up on deck and in portholes, and while one of the motor boats headed for the vessel the other slipped down shore toward us.

"Now find the axes we left back yonder in the grass; we'll open a box," Dempster bade two of his men.

During the search for the tools the prisoners were handcuffed together in pairs, except Corwin, who was granted the doubtful favor of separate irons.

"Did you see anything of Ratchford and Malmesbury?" Dempster inquired of me, when this business was finished.

"Ratchford was on board the ship, and Malmesbury was managing the scow," I informed him. "He was here talking to us when you attacked, but ran down to the float."

"One of the men tells me a fellow, who, I believe, was the Englishman, fled to the scow and afterward jumped into the water, escaping."

"Then he got away?" I asked.

"For the time being, but unless he swims to the mainland we'll catch him. There are one or two of the sailors

also who are loose on the island; we'll round them all up."

"And Moreles? I don't see him among your prisoners."

"He's dead."

"Dead!" I exclaimed, startled at this unexpected news.

"Yes, shot. He and another with him resisted. Their bodies are lying not far from his tent, where they fell. We'll bury them in the morning."

The searchers now returned with the axes. Though I knew what the stout packing cases contained, I nevertheless found my interest in their contents revived, and so with Caroline approached nearer to the box which Dempster ordered opened. The sailors remained on one side under guard, their first sullenness abated and succeeded by the stolid indifference which men acquire who have experienced the quick changes of luck in questionable ventures. Moreover, they knew that though the leaders of the illicit expedition would probably receive long prison sentences their own punishment as humble accessories to the crime would be limited to jail terms. Corwin at a command was led forward to witness the operation.

"Smash in the cover!" Dempster ordered the axemen.

The axes swung, and boards broke. Half a dozen blows were sufficient to demolish the top and scatter the pieces. When the workmen stepped back, Dempster advanced and bent over the case. The light was bad, so that one could not see its interior. He put a hand down into it, felt about. Then he ceased to move, remaining with his hand still thrust into the box and staring. Finally he straightened up, a look of bewilderment on his face that gradually changed to anger.

"Bring here one of those cases yonder!" he commanded, indicating several that rested on the beach where they had been placed ready to load on the scow.

One was brought. Again the axes were lifted; again the top was smashed. For a second time, Dempster bent forward and made an examination, even going down on a knee over the case. At last he rose, a little wearily, I thought, and dusted his hands. Corwin looked from Dempster to the box and from the box to Dempster again, as if in perplexity at the other's course.

Dempster turned about to face him.

"This will not get you off," he said wrathfully.

"You speak in riddles," Corwin replied.

"You understand me well enough."

For a time the two men eyed each other. Their words and their behavior were incomprehensible to me. I had expected Dempster to draw a rifle from the box with which to seal Corwin's guilt, but it was not forthcoming.

"Lift up the case and empty it!" Dempster bade his men.

It was raised on end and heaved forward. Out of the opening spouted extraordinary cargo for a gun runner's business—several small logs and a gush of sand.

Corwin stared incredulously for a moment. Then he recovered himself; indeed, displayed something of his old masterfulness.

"Well?" said he. "Why am I manacled?"

And on the evidence produced the recent autocrat of Webb House appeared to have rather the best of the situation.

CHAPTER XXII.

NO EVIDENCE.

Caroline and I were once more in the boat on our way to Cericia. On the island behind us, the revenue officers remained with their prisoners to examine the whole contraband cargo in order to learn whether all or only a part of the boxes had been refilled with sand. How Dempster had been

able to make a landing and suprise Corwin's camp without detection can be explained by the fact that his men disembarked while the two guards were conveying Caroline and me to the fire. On their return to their post, they were seized and gagged before they could give an alarm. We therefore had, in a degree, contributed to Corwin's discomfiture.

"Tom?" Caroline presently said, as I pulled at the oars.

"Yes?" I asked.

"I want you to take back the trousers you said I had assumed. You know what is best to do about things, and I don't. You were right in wishing to stay away from the island." And after a thoughtful pause, she added: "I've had enough thrills to last me a whole lifetime, and from now on I hope nothing exciting happens."

"I feel like resting a bit myself," said I. "But the end is not yet."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"We've your aunt still to deal with."

"True, she can be disagreeable. But we're going to Mr. Dempster's cottage to-night, you said."

"We're going to Webb House," I replied.

"Oh, no, we dare not. If we went, those dreadful men from the village would come for you again, then we'd have our running away to do a second time."

Before answering her, I rowed steadily for a time. The miles to be covered now seemed desperately long, tired as I was by the excitement and strain under which I had been all day, and feeling with the lift from danger a natural reaction.

"Don't think for a minute that we're going to Dempster's," I said finally. "Cericia will have its ears pulled when the officers come if it attempts any more mob business. Webb House is ours, so there we go—this time to stay. Ah, Corwin and the Englishmen will be coming back, too, in the morning when Dempster has caught Malmesbury. Just fancy your aunt's and your cousin's joy at having their three fine gentlemen return so soon. I want to be on hand at the meeting."

"Fancy their joy, if that's what you call it, when they see us to-night. I'm almost afraid to encounter aunt's tongue."

I stopped my rowing.

"You need fear nothing," said I. "Undoubtedly, she'll be in a bad temper at our return, but the worse it is the worse it will be for her in the end. Mrs. Belknap is booked for some severe shocks in the next twenty-four hours from all quarters."

The first of these came when, after beaching the boat, we marched up the slope and advanced into her presence on the veranda. The hour was just midnight. Probably the loneliness of the house, caused by the absence of their friends, accounted for the late vigil of the Belknaps.

As the light from the porch lamp fell on us, Mrs. Belknap started up.

"You two! What are you doing here?" she exclaimed, with a face growing hard.

"We knew you'd be anxious until we came back, so here we are," I replied. "No villagers hiding in the closets, are there?"

To this inquiry the woman vouchsafed no response. Indeed, she grew disdainful. For a little she regarded first me and then Caroline, with lips drawn in a tight line and with eyes cold as stone.

"You can't enter this house, neither of you," she stated at last sharply. "You're to understand that, Caroline, as well as this man. I'll not have you here after running about in the woods and the dark with this fellow like an abandoned creature. I'm now in charge of this house—and you two will stay out of it."

"Remember that Caroline is your niece, Mrs. Belknap," said I. "Have you no sympathy or kindness to bestow on her in her misfortune? Do you not feel any stir of pity for her?"

"I do not. She deserves none."

"Does not your relationship make it a duty to care for her?"

"She forfeited any claim to relationship when she disobeyed me and when she cast aside all propriety. I want nothing to do with either of you—and you shall not enter this house!"

"Then you wish wholly to be rid of her?"

"I do. I never want to see her face again, and I disown her as niece."

I turned to Caroline.

"You hear?" I asked.

"Yes, I hear," was her quiet reply.

Once more I faced the woman.

"You've made yourself plain; I trust that you'll recall these words at another time in the future," I said. "From this minute, Caroline, by your own wish, is no longer your niece. But remember this, she's my future wife. Now we're coming in."

The woman interposed herself.

"You shall not enter!" she said.

"Do not compel me to use force, madam, in order to push by."

If eyes could have consumed, hers would have left nothing of me then. For two or three minutes I waited, while she glared.

"Women are helpless against a brute," she at last hissed, moving aside and drawing Olive back.

"Come, Caroline," I repeated.

"The men in the village shall deal with you in the morning," the aunt stated by way of threat. "You'll pay for this treatment of me." To which I made no answer except to lead Caroline in.

I anticipated that the Belknaps would breakfast next morning either before or after Caroline and me in order to avoid contact with us. It was with something of surprise and even a little with amusement, then, that I perceived them sweep downstairs as we entered the dining room.

Mrs. Belknap carried a haughty head to her accustomed place, while Olive exhibited rather more of spitefulness in her manner than of arrogance.

"I trust you ladies rested comfortably," I said, with a bow.

"Do not address us, sir; at least allow us that immunity," was her cold rejoinder. "If you're still here when Mr. Corwin returns, which will be in a week—if you're still here, as you no doubt purpose, being the sort of bully you are, I'll not have to ask immunity then; he'll see to that."

"Mr. Corwin will be back this morning, if you would know," I remarked, unfolding my napkin.

Her eyes opened in astonishment at this statement, but immediately narrowed in scorn.

"You're not informed of his movements, I imagine."

"Well, in this particular case I happen to be. He'll be here before noon."

"Thank Heaven, if that be true!"

"You'll find it so—and Mr. Ratchford and probably Mr. Malmesbury will be with him. We'll all have a pleasant reunion."

The meal was at last done. Caroline and I strolled forth to a place at one end of the veranda, upon which the Belknaps presently emerged as if determined to assert their rights and lodged themselves at the other. Aside from hostile, menacing glances, we were spared their attention. It was not much later that I saw upon the water in the east a trace of smoke which soon grew into a smudge. As I had predicted, Corwin was coming. Next, Caroline and I made out the ship flanked by the motor boats, slowly growing larger and more distinct. With their approach, Cericia awoke to the fact that it had

visitors, whereupon it resorted to the beach almost to the last member, as large craft were infrequent in these waters. When the ship arrived some half mile off shore, its anchor was dropped, while the two other boats made for the pier below us.

Cericia, too, had pointed for the pier, bent on discovering the occasion of this singular visit, and arrived at about the same time as the boats, from which the prisoners were being disembarked. The officers motioned the inquisitive townsmen back until an open space by the land end of the pier was obtained, where the crowd from the boats was moved. Then Dempster marched his cohort up the slope toward us, with the villagers walking on either side and at the rear of the manacled men, and popping their eyes out at what they saw.

"What are all these men doing here? What does it mean?" Olive asked her mother uneasily.

"I don't know yet, but be patient," was the reply. "We'll learn presently. Mr. Corwin is engaged in large and important affairs, and of course employs many people."

"But——" Olive paused to stare a second time. "But he has something tied about his wrists, and so has Mr. Ratchford. They're walking in front. I don't understand it."

"Be still a minute—and stand aside so I can see."

The small army of officers and prisoners and white villagers and black tramped steadily nearer, until, at a word, it stopped some paces before the house. When I directed my look at Mrs. Belknap to observe how she took her friends' predicament, I saw incredulity and horror depicted on her face.

"Mr. Corwin! Mr. Ratchford!" she exclaimed, rising out of her chair.

The former returned her look imperturbably, the latter glowered at her, and his lips moved over a curse.

At this moment, several of the townspeople, until now occupied by the wonder of the stranger throng, beheld me and broke forth in new exclamations, which ended by their starting in my direction with the loudly expressed intention of not letting me escape this time.

Dempster came a step, and leaped up on the veranda edge.

"Stop where you are!" he commanded in a voice that halted them in their tracks. "I've one word to say to you folks, and, when it's said, you will go back to your homes, for you're not wanted here. Mr. Masson did not kill your man Dodds; he had nothing to do with the killing, and knew nothing about the killing until after it happened." A murmur of disbelief met his words; he motioned for silence. "I know of what I'm speaking, for Mr. Masson was with me at the time Dodds was killed. We were in my boat on the water."

"What about that cap of his'n?" a voice asked in shrill inquiry.

"Well, what about it? It was stolen from his room by the man named Malmesbury, whom you know, and it was given by him to the Mexican whom some of you have seen in Brown's bar and elsewhere. The Mexican killed Dodds because the latter learned his secret here; he placed the cap in his hand to make you people think exactly what you have thought—that Masson committed the murder. Now you know the truth, and now you know the murderer. Remember this mistake the next time you set out to lynch a man."

The village constable pushed forward toward Dempster, expectorated twice, then extended a hand.

"I didn't arrest the feller, as you reckoned I'd better not," he said, with satisfaction. "Shake! I didn't know you was a constable yourself."

Dempster shook Cericia's official hand.

"Take these people home; I'm done with them. There's the road."

"Don't you need my help with these desprite characters you got hold of here?" And the constable gazed critically at the group of prisoners.

"I think we can handle them safely. So you start your people home or I'll arrest them all and ship them to Mobile as accessories to these men's crime. Take them away, all of them—except you, Brown. Step this way!"

The storekeeper reluctantly advanced. At a signal from Dempster, two of his officers caught Brown's arms. A short, fierce struggle ensued; then the man stood handcuffed and enraged.

"What's this for?" he demanded angrily.

"You're wanted," Dempster said. "If you're wise, you'll make no further trouble."

"Sure you don't need me?" the constable inquired.

"Haven't you started yet?" Dempster thundered.

"Going, going," came the quavering reply. And the constable, facing round and flapping his arms at the villagers, cried: "Get home! Get home, if you don't want to go to jail! He says I'm to 'rest you all if you don't move 'long." And with the whole flock of villagers before him, who were now only too eager to be away from the ominous presence of the man they once thought mad, he went flapping and shooing them ahead.

Dempster, after speaking a word to one of his lieutenants, drew me aside.

"I must examine and list the names of this bunch of men and get statements from those who'll talk," he said. "But first I want to learn whether Corwin kept any papers here."

"I think not," I answered; "at least, I didn't find any in the library. If he had any, he has probably destroyed them, but we might have a look."

A search of desk, filing cases, and last his room revealed no incriminating documents, and, in fact, no documents at all. The man had not left a piece of paper as large as a thumb nail.

"The crafty scoundrel! I haven't a thing against him," my companion said, as we descended the stair. "What's more, I'm keeping him and his men prisoners without evidence, and he knows it; he's cool as ice. Rightfully, I shouldn't detain them, and have no grounds to do so, but I'll not turn them loose until I'm convinced the stuff can't be found. That would mean watching him all over again until he moved it. There's a trick here I don't understand; I can't make it out. If I thought our raid had been tipped off—but that's nonsense; I know it was not."

"There were guns in one box," said I, "for I felt them and brought one off. You have it at your cottage."

"At my cottage, yes; that's just the trouble," he answered, with a bitter smile. "Standing in my house, it's no evidence. All of the guns are what I want and what I expected to seize—and I got a barrow load of sand!"

"In every box?" I exclaimed.

"In every last one. And we hunted high and low, ransacked the island, dug everywhere. You said last night Corwin was as much surprised as anybody at seeing sand in the cases. Well, then, who moved the guns, and where are they?"

"Don't ask me. Still, I'm convinced of the truth of what I said when we were discussing the matter after you smashed in the lids—Corwin knew no more of the substitution than did we."

"That only deepens the mystery," he remarked.

And deepen it it did, for two nights before, when he and I stole on the Mexican, the rifles were in the boxes, or, at any rate, in some. In some!

Could the others already have had the guns removed? Could the ammunition cases already have been emptied and the boxes even then been refilled with sand and sticks? I remembered that the case from which I had withdrawn my spoil was half empty. Why should it be necessary to open and repack the weapons at all? Now it was clear in my mind. Moreles' night work explained the legerdemain that appeared last evening to have been practiced before our eyes. And Corwin, the chief conspirator, he himself had been double-crossed, a fact of which he was now aware and of which he was determined to take advantage. With whoever had tricked he could settle later.

Moreles stuck in my head like a bur. I began to pace to and fro, considering all the facts concerning him. If this did not explain his secret night business, what did? Why, too, his visits to the store against instructions? Why his meetings with Malmesbury? Had I not had earlier a suspicion the pair were up to something that Ratchford did not know about? Why had Malmesbury let me off from an accusation in the library when he knew I had been spying on him? Why had Malmesbury and Moreles met privately at——

I softly began to whistle. I whistled a lullaby and I whistled a march and I whistled a jig-time piece; and the difference in tempo marked my progress toward a solution of the mystery.

"Well, Moreles will not profit by it," I said to myself, aloud.

"Moreles is dead," Dempster rejoined.

"We'll have to do our best without him."

"Our best is as good as nothing just now. But I'm not through. I'm going back to the island for another search; those guns are somewhere there. Masson, I've simply got to find that stuff!"

The iron spirit of the man never showed to better advantage than now when weary, when worn by a sleepless night of action and responsibility, oppressed by a sense of failure, he spoke his resolution yet to win.

I brought forth from my pocket a silver dollar.

"Will you bet that much you find the guns?" I asked.

"Man, do you think this is a trivial matter?" he questioned in turn, with a frown.

"Very well, then, if you don't like it that way, will you bet that much I can't find them?"

He came all alive in a leap, and caught me by the shoulder.

"What do you know? What do you know about the guns?" he demanded.

"I know where they are; it just came to me."

"Then tell me, quick. Malmesbury is loose; we're losing time."

I started toward the door.

"Come on," said I. "Bring some men; we may need them. Here's where I square accounts with all three gentlemen—Corwin, Ratchford, and Malmesbury."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE LAST OF THE METAL.

Accompanied by half a dozen men, Dempster and I walked rapidly up the Hampden Road. The wood on either side was quiet. Through the boughs of the trees the sun sifted in warm, bright lances, and fell here and there on open spaces of the road in clear floods. All was so peaceful, so fragrant, so drowsy under the blue sky, that it seemed, with Cericia and its scenes of strife left behind, we were walking in another world.

At length we reached the leaning tree by the roadside, by which I had marked the faint path where Malmesbury turned off when I first trailed him. Without trouble, I discovered the depression like an old furrow, that was covered by pine needles, and pointed

it out to Dempster, who nodded his understanding. Thereupon, we set off in the direction it led.

"This leads to an old cabin," said I.

"You appear to know where you're going," Dempster answered. "Apparently, you knew more of this gun plot than you made me believe."

"I supposed you interested only in seaweed when I carried out this little investigation, and what I learned I imagined of no particular importance until twenty minutes ago. Malmesbury is still at large, you say?"

"Yes. He was not on the island this morning, so he must have swum round to Moreles' camp after we left it last night, got the Mexican's boat, and crossed over to the mainland."

"He may, then, be hiding out at this old cabin."

"What makes you think so? Has he been here before?"

"Once that I know of—once when I saw him meet Moreles. It was their secret rendezvous, as I discovered when I followed the Englishman to the spot. Why the pair should get together in such an out-of-the-way place I didn't understand at the time, but it's clear to me now, in the light of later events. The cabin is on the bank of a creek."

"I think I know the creek," he said. "While inspecting the coast east of the village, and getting my bearings of the island, I found its mouth, but thought nothing of it. What happened when Malmesbury and Moreles met?"

"Well, for one thing, they caught Lafe Dodds, who had paddled up the creek after Moreles to see what he was doing. He was trailing the Mexican as I was trailing Malmesbury. They caught him, and were about to kill him, when he escaped. The Englishman chased him. Dodds, however, was too speedy—and you saw the end of the chase when they broke out of the wood upon the beach."

"I remember. And that was why Moreles murdered Dodds?"

"Yes. They were afraid he would talk."

"Did they learn of your presence, too?" he asked shrewdly. "Was that why Malmesbury stole your cap?"

"The Mexican knew of it, for he stumbled over me, and made me a prisoner, to hold until the Englishman returned. Miss Webb released me. She knew I had followed after Malmesbury, because she wanted to come, too, which I forbade; but she stole after, without my knowledge, and well she did, for it was her aid that enabled me to free myself from my cords and slip away. As it was, Moreles took a shot at us. Malmesbury, however, didn't know anything of my affair until after he obtained the cap. He simply needed some person on whom to shift the guilt of Dodds' prospective death, which he had already determined on; and because I had quarreled with the young fellow, I appeared the most suitable for his purpose. Besides, he wished, I think, to be rid of me on general principles; there was a chance I might learn something. Dodds and I would be two birds at one stone."

"I thought I knew everything that was going on here," Dempster remarked, "but I see I was considerably in the dark. What about this old house? Did you get a look into it?"

"No. Moreles saw to that. I'm convinced, however, that the stuff you want is there, for Malmesbury and Moreles were there; and, where they were, there should be the guns. It's the logical hiding place; it is abandoned, and believed haunted; no one ever visited it. As each wagonload of freight arrived at the island, Moreles doubtless secretly opened the cases and fetched the guns up the creek in his boat."

"I see," said he. "I see. And at the last minute of the ship's sailing the two men planned to slip overboard in

the darkness, and let Corwin sail away with the sand. Very smooth. Then they'd move their loot somewhere else, and sell it in Mexico on their own hook, and clean up a fat bank roll. I take off my hat to Mr. Malmesbury. He has brains as well as teeth."

"Well, look out that he doesn't use the latter to bite. He's a bad proposition," I warned. "He and Moreles were a strong pair to draw to."

"There's pepper in every Mexican dish, you know. We'll take care of Malmesbury. But he doesn't know Moreles is dead; he'll think the man a prisoner. Won't he keep away from here on the chance the fellow might give the cache away?"

"Not if I know the Englishman," I stated. "He'll not give up his loot now. If anything, he'll move it to a new hiding place on that very chance—and he'll have guessed that some of the boxes have been opened by this time."

"He has nerve. The trick he pulled off under Corwin's nose shows that," Dempster admitted. "And if he could save the guns, he'd think to do even Moreles out of his share of profit. I wouldn't have put it past either of the pair to plan to slip a knife into the other, at the end, in order to have the whole booty."

"We'll quickly learn if Malmesbury is here, and we'd better stop speaking," I said, for thickening clumps of underbrush indicated that we were drawing near our destination.

Moving more and more slowly ahead, and exercising ever greater watchfulness, I motioned the others to a halt at a sound that reached my ears. It was faint and dull, a noise so choked by the intervening undergrowth that I was unable to distinguish its nature except it was a sort of thump. Something distant might have been tossed down on boards.

"Do you hear that?" I whispered to Dempster.

"Yes. What is it?"

"I can't tell; but some one is there."

A dozen paces nearer we crept. The eaves and roof of the old house came in view, as shadowed, as dismal, as the first time I had beheld them. Again came the thumping sound. I placed it as being on the creek bank.

Six more paces. Now, through a vent in the brush, I could see both house and that part of the clearing which lay in front of it. The decayed cabin conveyed even more strongly the impression given by its roof: lifelessness, silence, must, and evil. Little wonder the negroes shunned it as haunted, for it exuded an atmosphere of rottenness, and seemed to hold a lurking spirit of sinister deeds. The clearing was unchanged; there was the same uncanny light under the spreading trees, the same poisonous green in the surrounding cover, the dank smell of creek water and slime, the fixity of every object, the hush and the suggestion of pestilence and wickedness and death. Only Moreles was not here. But there might be another present equally evil and murderous.

Ah! The man was present!

Reaching back a hand, I gripped Dempster and drew him beside me, where he, too, might see. For out of the cabin had walked Malmesbury, bearing a bundle wrapped in sacking. Its weight was considerable, as he staggered once in his advance to the creek's bank, out from under which protruded the stern of a boat—Lafe Dodds' boat it must have been—as I perceived on craning forward.

"The guns! See! Their barrels are exposed!" Dempster breathed. "You were right!"

"And Malmesbury it is!"

"Yes. We catch him, too."

Dempster was distinctly pleased. Even in his whisper I could mark his satisfaction. To obtain the guns was the chief thing, of course, but to cap-

ture the last member of the criminal band along with them would give the final measure of triumph.

He turned his head to command his men.

"Wait! He'll come nearer," I said.

"Waiting never pays. Ready, you fellows!"

The bushes parted as we went through, and fell together behind us again with scarcely a rustle of their leaves. Malmesbury, who had paused at the creek's edge to take breath, stooped forward to pass his load into the boat. Again a thump when it dropped. By the time he stood erect again we were several paces toward him, moving noiselessly on the damp turf, spreading out fanwise, taking him in a net.

I think no footstep of ours alarmed the man. When he turned he simply turned to go back to the cabin for another armful of guns. Then he stopped as if struck. His eyes flashed along our line, his lip curled back from his long teeth in bafflement and fury, and, next instant, he leaped three steps aside and plunged into the cover.

Dempster's revolver cracked as he disappeared. We all began to shoot where he had gone, receiving in answer a bullet that sped over our heads, and a second. Rushing forward, we poured our fire into the underbrush until our weapons were emptied.

"Load, and follow him!" Dempster ordered, suiting action to word.

The prospect of entering that jungle, where our enemy could lie hidden and shoot at any stir, had no charm. I confess to feeling a sickish sensation, and the revenue service suddenly appeared to have responsibilities that appalled my amateur mind. Still, I was resolved to go through with the business somehow, for Malmesbury, if he escaped, might come up behind me some day, which would be just as bad. If I were to be shot, I wanted the bullets in front. We all have certain small points of pride.

Dempster was no parade leader. He led now.

"After me, all together!" he cried, running forward.

We dove into the entanglement of bushes and vines, lunged ahead, keeping as best able our guns before us to be ready to return the Englishman's fire the instant his revolver spoke. We pushed and struggled and ripped our way in; then, with growing surprise that no report greeted us, slackened our efforts and began to exchange guarded words.

A shout came from one of the men. Immediately we worked our way to him. Pressing back the undergrowth with an arm, he stood, bent down, regarding a figure half screened by leaves.

"Stumbled over him," he said, as we reached the spot.

"Dead?" Dempster asked.

"Not yet, but going."

Panting still from our fierce fight with the interlaced vegetation, we crowded about Malmesbury's prostrate form. The Englishman lay on his back, his eyes were glazed, and life was ebbing fast. Once he moistened his lips with his tongue—the old habit. His pistol yet remained in his hand, but the fingers had relaxed about it.

"The bally game's up. Get me out," he muttered.

This was no easy task, though we somehow accomplished it and laid him on open ground in the clearing. His cheeks were pale. One of the men opened his shirt to stanch the flow of blood, at which Malmesbury attempted to shake his head.

"No use. Done for. Lift my——"

The words failed on his lips. It was too late for raising his head, which we divined to be his desire. A quiver passed over his body, his lips slowly parted, and the spirit of the man who

strove to bring me to my death had gone from Cericia and from earth.

Dempster moved his hand in a gesture of finality.

"It is over. Cover his face, and let us leave him," he said. "Come! We'll have a look round."

The cabin was our first objective. It comprised one room, some twenty feet long by twelve wide, dim and moldy, which was nearly full of bundles of rifles wrapped in sacking and of bags of ammunition. Dempster jerked one of the former free, and a dozen guns spilled on the floor.

"Some Mexican patriot will wait in vain to start his revolution," said he.

"And Carranza will never know he's been saved another outbreak," I added.

"In time he will. A note will go from the state department to the Mexican government, in due season, giving him the information. If you had your deserts, you'd have honorable mention in it."

"Spare me that. Moreles' relations might learn it," I said.

"Very well. Now, let us go where he was moving the stuff. We should be able to follow his trail."

This was not difficult. On the opposite side of the creek we found his footprints in the soft soil, leading not more than a hundred yards into the underbrush. Need of haste had pressed the man. At the end of his trampled path, and in a thicket, we located two dozen or so bundles of the guns. Given two or three hours more, he would have succeeded in transporting here all his loot, after which he would have removed the signs of his trail and departed to await a later day for further operations. And in that jungle the guns would never have been found.

A bullet had ended that.

Half an hour later, when we were ready to go, the weapons had been brought back across the creek and Malmesbury's body borne within the cabin, where, stark and silent, it kept company with his guns. For a last time I looked around the little clearing. As before, it was bordered by its poisonous green vines; the odor of decay and stagnant water was heavy; its hush once more had settled down; the old cabin stood black and evil.

"That death cabin shall be torn down," said I, moving off with Dempster, after he had posted a pair of men to guard the spot. "The whole place here is full of horror. I never want to see it again until these trees are cut down and the brush is cleared and an orange orchard is growing under the sun."

"An orange orchard! Oh, no!" Dempster exclaimed, with a laugh, for he felt none of my depression, and was in good humor at the way things had turned out. "An orange orchard, never, my son! If I recall your talk rightly, your line is to be cabbages."

CHAPTER XXIV.

CALM AT CERICIA.

When we had come back to Cericia, and Dempster had dispatched his prisoners on board the vessel; when he had listened to Sally Brown, who asserted her father's innocence of complicity in Corwin's plot, having but been hired to haul freight, and who received an assurance that if he were not guilty he would later be set free; when we had routed out every ramshackle vehicle in Cericia, and every horse and mule, sending them to the old cabin to bring in the contraband guns; when Dempster had conferred with his lieutenants; when he had fed, petted, and released, to fly home, the carrier pigeons which he had used to communicate with headquarters; when all these things had been done, then we began to think of luncheon.

At my invitation, Dempster remained to eat at Webb House, where Mrs. Bel-

knap welcomed him with aplomb. Though the situation was still confused in her mind, and, in consequence, she was on guard until she had all facts thoroughly in hand, he, however, appeared at present to be the dominant spirit, and therefore worthy of consideration.

When we were at table, she set out to learn which way the wind blew.

"Is there not some mistake in the arrest of Mr. Corwin and Mr. Ratchford?" she inquired tentatively, fixing her eye upon my friend.

"None, madam. Our proof of their crime is absolute," he said.

"Will they be placed in prison?"

"Undoubtedly. The government isn't lenient with men of their type when they're caught breaking laws."

A pause, during which Mrs. Belknap considered.

"Now that the truth is out, I'll say that I always suspected there was something wrong with them," she announced. "They were too close-mouthed about their business for it to be honest. When I questioned them concerning its nature, they persisted in putting me off with evasive answers."

"I can well believe it, madam," Dempster said dryly.

"As a result of Mr. Corwin's arrest, I'm left in a rather peculiar position," she went on. "Last night, when he departed, the man placed his property here in my charge. There seems to be nothing else for me to do but remain and manage the estate while he's absent."

"Corwin doesn't own this property, and never has," said Dempster.

Mrs. Belknap ceased to breathe, an image of stone.

"What!" she finally gasped, while from the lips of her daughter came, like an echo, an agonized "What!"

"Sad, but true," quoth Dempster, breaking a piece of bread.

"Then, in Heaven's name, who does own it?"

"Why, Miss Caroline, of course—that is, her part of it. Mr. Masson owns the other half. You see, Mrs. Belknap, this fellow Corwin is a criminal in more ways than one, and the crime for which I've arrested him isn't his only one. On the death of Miss Webb's father, the man appeared here with a deed, it seems, and claimed ownership of the estate. But his deed was forged. It will be set aside, and the title to the property will be restored. Yes, you have the happiness of knowing your niece has come into her own again." His smile was affable.

Mrs. Belknap had gone a little pale, while Olive sat with open mouth. The mother's brain, under the shock, was working fast to resort her cards, but by her daughter's round black eyes I saw the light of understanding was not in Olive.

Then Mrs. Belknap patted her hair and again engaged Dempster.

"It will be a relief," she stated smoothly, "to resume the quiet order of our household as it was before those men disturbed it by their intrusion. When, after a rest, we have some friends join us, the house will liven up. There are charming spots in the neighborhood for picnics and excursions, and with some young men in our house party the girls will be well entertained."

"You apparently overlook me, madam. I'm already here," said I.

That she had done so, her manner bore out. Her eyes moved on me with surprise, which was succeeded by annoyance.

"Oh, you!" she answered, rather impolitely.

"And Caroline and I expect to be married soon, you know."

"Indeed!" she exclaimed, her annoyance visibly increased. "Not before a proper interval of time, I'd say. Any marriage Caroline makes will take place

only when she has decided the matter at length and with wise advice. The honorable thing for you to do is to return to Philadelphia, remaining away from her not less than six months, in order that she may meet other young men, and learn her own mind, and know positively whether or not she wishes to marry you. I've known many young girls to change their minds after acting on impulse, and I'm sure, Mr. Masson, you wish only Caroline's happiness."

"I'm sure I do," said I.

"Then that's settled. I'm glad you agree with me in the wisdom of not attempting to force Caroline into a hasty marriage."

"Oh, there's no question of forcing," I rejoined.

"Thank you. That is well. By your staying away from Cericia and from Caroline, you'll both learn your own hearts. You may rest assured that while you're North I'll care for her interests. Yes, I'm pleased to find you so reasonable."

This arrangement was perfectly satisfactory, except to the chief persons concerned—Caroline and me. Otherwise, it might do.

"You have failed to understand the entire situation, Mrs. Belknap," I remarked, after a pause. "Even if I were to grant the soundness of your arguments, I should, nevertheless, find it necessary to remain at Cericia. You see, I'm half owner of the estate."

A depreciatory smile came upon her lips.

"I fancy you're mistaken, Mr. Masson. Being engaged to Caroline doesn't give you a half interest in her property; marriage, in fact, wouldn't give. No, you mustn't presume on that, Mr. Masson, or I fear we shall gain the idea that you're a bit of a fortune hunter—I'll not say you are, but it might leave that impression." And she looked, with a warning uplift of her brows, at Caroline.

I helped myself to a slice of cold roast which a servant at that moment was passing. In order that she might enjoy the full measure of my humiliation, I made my selection with considerable care.

"Your deduction is slightly awry, madam," said I calmly.

"In what respect, if you please?"

"In this: I owned a half share of the estate, and Caroline owned the other half, before we ever set eyes on one another." Which made her blink rapidly a couple of times.

Presently she said: "I had not understood that—Caroline had failed to inform me of the fact—but I'm sure, Mr. Masson, that the property will not suffer on that account. You're a young man of ability, I know, and thoroughly conversant with business affairs, and can attend the property very successfully. While I know little of its management, I'll lend you what aid I can. You and I—for Caroline, of course, will not wish to be bothered—will determine matters as they arise. You'll like the life here, I'm confident."

Olive now emerged into the light.

"Indeed, you will, and I know we'll get on together famously!" she exclaimed, in a sudden gush. "For I always said you were different from Mr. Ratchford and Mr. Malmesbury, who were forward and impudent, and often rude; you never were ungentlemanly, and I'm sure you're never uninteresting." Here business of the eyes. "And we'll hunt flowers and swim and row—we'll have splendid times together."

Mrs. Belknap's look rested approvingly on her daughter, her own face, meanwhile, grown gracious.

"I certainly expect to be fond of Webb House," I said.

"And of us all, we hope," the mother appended, with a winning smile.

For the remainder of the meal their

talk ran buoyantly on this and on that which should happen—little trips, amusements, parties, and pastimes. In this the others of us did not join; and at last, when we were done, and when Dempster must go, I think Mrs. Belknap was quite sure of herself and her station.

On the veranda, we bade Dempster good-by. He must superintend the loading of the guns and ammunition which had begun to come in, and get all shipshape on board before sailing, and he chose to make his farewell here, knowing that Caroline and I would not wish to accompany him to the pier, where we might behold Corwin and Ratchford. He wrung my hand, then warmly pressed Caroline's, and finally promised to visit us at Webb House when we were married. Then he went down the slope to the boat.

"A pleasant gentleman, after all," Mrs. Belknap said, with the air of one who moved among nobility.

"But let us talk of your wedding!" Olive cried. "It must take place here at Cericia! Why, we'll make the house into a beautiful bower for the occasion! It shall be the loveliest thing imaginable!"

The moment for disillusionment had arrived. I looked at Caroline, and she gazed back at me, our understanding mutual in that the truth, unpleasant as it would be for them, must be told.

"Will you kindly place a chair just there for me, Mr. Masson, where it will have the breeze?" Mrs. Belknap said, at the moment. "And look inside for my fan, for the air is sultry. Also have one of the servants make and fetch me a glass of lemonade with mint. I'll want it soon."

Veiled though her words were by a gracious manner, they were rather of the nature of a command than a request. To all intents, my subordination had begun. I smiled to myself as I went to obey—for the first and last time.

When I returned, I took a position at Caroline's side.

"Mrs. Belknap, and you, also, Miss Olive, I wish you to listen to me for a moment," I said.

"Very well. You were careful to mention the mint in the lemonade?" the mother responded.

"I desire to explain matters," I went on steadily, "for apparently you do not realize what the situation here will be from this time on. Caroline and I are going to Philadelphia to be married."

"Dear me, that makes it uncomfortable!" Mrs. Belknap replied. "Travel, just now, will be distasteful; there are so many annoyances this season of the year. Still, I'm ready to go, if you prefer to be married there—and we can do some shopping."

"It isn't necessary that you go."

She waved her fan quickly, slightly put out by my assertion of rights.

"Propriety demands that I should be present at Caroline's nuptials. I am her aunt. But since you two seem headstrong in the matter, Olive and I will remain here and have the house prepared for your return from the honeymoon."

"Webb House will be closed during our absence," said I.

Instantly she stiffened; her hand closed tightly about the handle of her fan.

"Closed! What do you mean?"

"What I say. Shut, locked; left in charge of a caretaker."

"But how foolish!" she protested. "Olive and I will look after it!"

"You're mistaken, Mrs. Belknap. You will not look after it—for you'll not be here."

Her eyes flashed as if she sensed sudden danger, her face grew hard. I felt Caroline's hand steal up and take refuge against my arm.

"Do you mean we're to go out of the house?" the woman asked.

"Yes, Mrs. Belknap."

"That would necessitate our visiting friends while you were absent, or our going into one of the cottages to stay. That would be very inconvenient, and uncalled for."

"Still you don't seem to understand. You're to go altogether, and not come back," I said slowly, for this was a painful business.

Coming to her feet, she glared at me with hot eyes and with shaking cheeks. At her side hung Olive, trembling, scared, her lashes winking rapidly.

"You mean that you're putting us out?" the woman demanded, in a low voice.

"Madam, we're asking you to leave, that is all."

"Caroline, you've allowed him to persuade you to this!" she exclaimed. "I knew always that he hated us, and now you've yielded to him!"

"No," Caroline whispered, gripping my sleeve.

I lifted a protesting hand.

"Mrs. Belknap, we both feel the same about this. We're reluctant to ask it, and it makes us unhappy to do so, but it's on Caroline's account. After the words you uttered to her on this very spot——"

"Where are we to go? We've no money—we're alone. I'm growing old, and Olive has no one but me. It's hard to be driven out like this, onto the road, and with just the clothes on our backs. But we'll go—we'll go!" And a tear slipped down her trembling cheek.

I looked at Caroline. Her lip was quivering; she started forward, but I restrained her.

"You will not go empty of pocket, Mrs. Belknap," I said. "We're not driving you out to walk roads or to beg at doors, but surely you see the impossibility of your remaining here after all that has passed. Circumstances might have been otherwise; it is now too late. I'll have a check for one thousand dollars ready for you when you depart, and a carriage to convey you to Hampden. Your leaving within two or three days will suffice. In the interval you'll be able to make some plans for the future; and if a suggestion from me is not obnoxious, I'll recommend that you plan with the idea of acquiring a permanent home and securing Miss Olive in some employment that will provide you with an income, for this money will be exhausted in time."

Thus closing the matter, I led Caroline within doors. The mother and daughter should be left to themselves after this trying scene, and Heaven knows Caroline and I wished to be alone.

For the rest of the day, Mrs. Belknap and Olive stayed in their rooms, and it was only at evening, when I sent a servant to announce dinner, that they reappeared. Their first travail of spirit had subsided. Though their manner was subdued, their faces were composed, and they exchanged some words with us. Indeed, as the meal progressed, their courage began to rise. This friend and that, where they might go, was mentioned between them; this house censured and that praised, until in the end they were entirely engrossed with the discussion, and exceedingly animated.

"I think the Carters, at Birmingham, will be best to visit first, Olive," Mrs. Bedknap remarked. "We've not been there for three years, and, even though Mrs. Carter was a little tiffed about something when we left them, I'm sure she'll welcome us."

Olive's cheeks were aglow at the prospect.

"But first we should stop somewhere long enough to have clothes made," she declared. "I'm positively in rags!"

"Yes, dear, we both must improve our wardrobes, which have grown a bit shabby. I wonder if it wouldn't be well to spend a couple of weeks first in New Orleans. Let me see—who's

there. No, the Tenors wouldn't do, just yet—she was a little cold before. However, there are the Mentones—yes, we can spend a fortnight or so with them while getting our apparel."

"I'll write this very evening to let them know," Olive said.

"No, we'd best"—Mrs. Belknap considered critically—"best wait till we're on the train, when we can wire we're on the way. That will do."

"I must have at least three new gowns," Olive announced, "and shoes and hats and gloves. We'll make out the whole list to-night."

I lifted an eyebrow at Caroline. The thousand dollars had every appearance of lasting not more than several minutes. Moreover, the sad truth was borne in upon my mind that Olive would never bother about earning a dollar. She was thoroughly parasitic.

Caroline and I stood on the beach, a distance westward of Webb House. The sun had set, but its fires still spread a glory in the sky, transforming the few wisps of clouds to rose petals, turning the sea into wine and the waves that unfurled along the sands into bands of gold.

Dempster's vessels were swinging away from their moorage, on their passage home. We saw their crowded decks, we beheld a figure at the rail wave a hand, whereupon, in answer, we signaled farewell to our friend. Somewhere on the ship were Corwin and Ratchford, going to the prisoner's dock. Somewhere lay Malmesbury's body, covered and still, awaiting its shroud. Somewhere, Moreles was buried. For each of them Cericia had closed her account. As the smoke poured from the steamer's funnel, rolling black across the water in plumes that spread and thinned, a sense of peace not until then complete descended upon my spirit.

Calm at Cericia! The swells would continue to roll in upon the beach, bearing their gifts of shells and starfish and seaweed, but the men whose evil machinations had worked death here were gone never to return. Webb House no more would echo to their footfalls or ring to their laughter. Brown's store, with its strange girl in attendance, would not again see their figures. The old, abandoned cabin henceforth would be empty. The low, sandy island where the Mexican had drunk and sung and died would know now only warm Gulf breezes and languorous silence. Its buccaneers had vanished.

The ship, with its accompanying motor boats, moved farther and farther away, leaving only the trail of smoke. The colors were paling in the sky, the waters were growing dull. A few gulls swept by and out of sight.

I turned to look at Caroline. Her face was pensive, her blue eyes gazed across the sea as if to read what the future was writing there; and I thought how Fate—or should I say Love?—had heaped on me all the happiness man dare ask.

At last she spoke.

"It has been hard, and in some ways terrible," she said, "but I would not have it undone or unchanged. For it brought you to me."

"Your love suffices me for everything, what may come as well as what has happened," I answered softly. "See! We have Webb House, we have Cericia, and we have our love! I want no more."

"Our happiness, it cannot end—and our love is forever!"

Dusk came down. At our feet the waves rolled in and broke and slid upward, to the sea's ceaseless music. One by one, the stars shone forth in the sky, and one by one the great Gulf caught and held them in its deep bosom. The three gentlemen adventurers of Webb House had gone their way, but Love remained. Peace spread its wings over Cericia.

Homespun

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

Author of "Sunny Mateel," "Magic, of the Blue Mesa," Etc.

Homespun confessed that he had cold feet ever since the stranger joined the outfit. But Homespun always was a jester. His sense of humor was like the sun—always on the job

HE wasn't a bit countrified, either. He was called "Homespun" because, as the preacher put it, "he was all wool and a yard wide, and wore well." As a boy, he had worked in the mines at Cripple Creek, and the mines had not spoiled him. He was anything but bucolic. His sense of humor was like the sun—always on the job. He whistled while he worked and he whistled most of the time. His eye was blue, clear, and untroubled, and his complexion was a veritable bloom of ruddy health. Moreover, he drove the freighter's wagon that took the outfit across a corner of the New Mexican desert and into the Coyote Hills on that memorable bear hunt that terminated so unexpectedly.

With him went the preacher, a tall, well-set-up chap, with a pleasing voice, a quick, kind eye, and a forty-inch chest. As Homespun put it, "he was some preacher." And as a sort of interlocutor round the night fire, there was Oliver West, the third member of the expedition. West had been a college man, a hobo, a private secretary, a deputy sheriff, a writer, but at all times a man who had that incurable itch for wandering. He was known to be a big-game hunter of some note, and was invited to join the expedition.

At the first night camp, Homespun enlivened the party with a graphic description of what he should do should he meet up with a healthy bear. He declared that while the preacher still held an unbeaten record for the four-hundred-yard dash, he—Homespun—would endeavor to obliterate that record in the dust that he would create starting for town. He said frankly that he didn't know what he would do if a bear showed signs of coquetting with him. He said he didn't want to have any of *his* floating ribs knocked ashore, and that he hadn't lost any bears recently, anyhow.

The preacher also intimated that he wasn't in the best condition to run just then, but that he knew how.

Oliver West listened, and said nothing; but he approved silently of Homespun's frank avowal that bear killing was not in his line.

That night the outfit rolled in, somewhat surprised to find that the desert can scorch a man until his lips crack, at noon, and can freeze him to the point of arising and building a fire at three in the morning. Bed rolls were reconstructed next day, and none said a word about "rushing with a glad shout to dive into the nearest pool." Moreover, the nearest pool happened to be rimmed with ice.

The next day, as they nooned at another water hole, they were overtaken by a rider, a quiet-mannered fellow, who watered his pony, eased the cinches, and came and squatted with

them. He was hard to place. He said nothing about himself. Before the outfit had started again, the stranger and the preacher were acquainted, and, to Homespun's evident annoyance, the preacher invited the stranger to camp with them so long as his trail and theirs did not divide.

It was while West and Homespun were together on the driver's seat—the preacher and the stranger had ridden ahead—that Homespun unbosomed himself. "Don't like that new guy," he said, turning to West. "He's *too* quiet."

"Seems pleasant enough," said West.

"That's the trouble. If he was a grouch, I wouldn't say a word; or if he would talk. He's got a clam beaten clear back into deep water for keeping still. And did you notice that his pony is played out? You watch! He'll be riding on the wagon before night. He's going to save that pony all he can. He's made a hard ride from somewhere or somebody, and he's aiming to make another."

"Let him ride," said West, smiling. "There's plenty room."

"Too much," said Homespun. "I'm going to keep my eye on him. Did you notice he had a gun tucked under them chaps of his?"

"Yes. That's not unusual out here."

"No, but he is. I got a hunch."

"Speaking of bears——" began West.

"I never met up with one—but gimme a mad one tearin' up the rocks to get to me, rather'n one of them smooth, slick, quiet kind of guys. They ain't human."

"You're taking the fellow too seriously," said West.

"Mebby; and I'm goin' to keep on doin' it," said Homespun. Then he spoke to the team, which had, naturally, loafed during the talk. The big wagon started with a jerk. Ahead, the preacher and the stranger rode side by side, neither, so far as could be seen, saying anything.

Homespun revised his estimate of the stranger a bit that night. The man seemed expert at unroping packs, hobbling horses, and getting things shipshape around camp. After supper, he talked a little, quietly and to the point. Homespun listened, occasionally interpolating a remark intended to draw the other out. Such replies as the stranger made were, however, evasive. It was gathered that he had punched cattle—in fact, he got on and off a horse like a puncher—and that he had seen service as a mine guard during the great strike in Colorado. Homespun, having worked in the mines, asked a few pertinent questions. The stranger's answers were direct, but puzzling. He always spoke of things in general, and never of himself.

When blankets were unrolled, Homespun declared that, as he had not thawed out since the previous night, he would sleep close to the fire and keep it going. "When I woke up last night," he said, turning to the preacher, "I didn't know whether the feet at the bottom of my blankets was yours or mine." Homespun and the preacher had doubled up for warmth.

When the stranger went to see to his horse, just before turning in, Homespun nudged West. "He left his gun in the back of the wagon—that time when he said his hoss was played out and that he guessed he'd ride a spell. I got it."

"Well, if you're afraid of him, just empty the gun and put it where he left it," said West.

"And he left his chaps rolled up, near the gun. I tell you he's got a funny idea he's working out."

"Shucks! There's three to one," said West. "I'm not going to let any such idea spoil my sleep."

"I ain't, neither," said Homespun.

"If he's got a scheme, it won't be when we're asleep that he'll try it on. He's goin' to wait till that wall-eyed cayuse of his gets another night's rest before he tries anything. No, he won't spoil my sleep, for I ain't going to take any."

"Homespun," said West, grinning, "I believe that you're really getting cold feet."

"Had 'em—ever since he hit the outfit. And I'd like to get 'em warmed up again."

Meanwhile, Homespun had been busy. As he talked, he emptied the revolver and pulled each bullet from each shell with his teeth. Dumping the powder out of the shells, he worked the bullets back again, and slipped the dummy cartridges into the gun. Just as he had finished, West saw what he had done. "Just as well," he said, and turned in. As the stranger came from the shadows, Homespun was at the wagon, complaining because he could not find his slumber socks, as he called the moccasins he wore at night.

Among Homespun's effects was a ten-bore duck gun which he declared had more lateral range—he said "left-and-right range"—than a howitzer. The preacher, who had an eye for romance, tried to persuade Homespun that a rifle was the only weapon with which to shoot bear. But Homespun would hear of no rifle for himself. He said his smooth bore was good enough and heavy enough and mean enough at both ends to suit him; and he had supplied himself with a box of ten-gauge buckshot shells with which to uphold his theory that if he aimed in the general direction of anything within forty yards something would happen to it. "And I don't figure to let anything bigger'n a rabbit get closter than forty yards before I work the trombone," he had told his companions. That night, Homespun loaded the duck gun and slid it in his blankets.

A mist lay over the water hole, and a cold, gray dawn outlined the distant hills. The preacher snored. West slept quietly. Homespun lay beside the burned-out fire, wide awake, and staring at the stranger's blankets, which were empty; and at the place where the stranger's saddle had been, near the wagon. The mist over the water hole lightened a little. Homespun, without moving, peered across at West. Then his gaze drifted back to the water hole. The stranger was coming up the ridge nearest camp, leading his horse, bridled and saddled. Homespun's teeth began to chatter. He shut his jaws. He was not afraid of what he saw, but he was fearful of what he intended to do. The stranger led his horse to within fifteen yards of the wagon and then called: "Grub pile!"

The preacher's snoring ceased. He snorted, raised his head, and gazed about with sleep-heavy eyes. West yawned and sat up. The stranger stood with his gun leveled at West. Homespun shut his eyes and feigned sleep.

"What's the joke?" queried West. "Take it easy. I haven't a gun on me."

"Just shuffle out and stand against the wagon," said the stranger. "And you, too," he added, nodding at the preacher.

West got up and walked to the wagon, where he stood with his hands above his head. The preacher followed him, shivering in his scant array of underwear.

"You're next," said the stranger, calling to Homespun. "Get a move on!" And he kept West covered, paying little attention to the others.

"But we haven't any money—to speak of," said the preacher. "And you have eaten with us. What kind of a——"

"That'll do for you," said the stranger. "I'm in a hurry. Come on there!" And he strode forward just as Homespun stretched an arm and did a most natural yawn.

"Sure thing!" said Homespun, kicking back his blankets. And he kicked them clear of the duck gun, grabbed it as he sat—and whether or not he forgot that he had "fixed" the other's gun, he began to pump buckshot in the general direction of the stranger, who stood not forty, but less than twenty yards away.

"I wouldn't do it again for a million dollars," said Homespun, as he hitched up to the wagon and swung the horses toward home. "I was scared stiff! But he deserved it—the snake!"

"Yes; and you saved me a nasty piece of work," said West.

Homespun pulled up the team. "Then you knew who he was all the time! Why in Hades didn't you loosen up? I—I—never wanted to kill nobody!" And Homespun bowed his head and sobbed, the reins slack in his hands.

Oliver West said nothing until Homespun had pulled himself together. Then he touched Homespun's arm. Homespun turned. West was holding back the lapel of his coat. Homespun saw a blue-and-silver badge. "United States marshal!" he exclaimed.

West nodded. "I suspected him, but I wanted him to show his hand. He showed it sooner than I thought he would."

"Would you killed him?" queried Homespun.

"If I had been in your place—yes," was the other's answer. For a long time, Homespun puzzled over his companion's reply. Then he seemed to brighten. "Say, West, if it's all the same to you—just tell the folks back in town that you done it. I don't want any of that kind of glory. It's—kind of more in your line, anyhow."

The preacher, riding behind the wagon with bowed head and hands folded on the saddle horn, heard, and nodded to himself. He thought of the night camps they would have to make before reaching town, and of the shadow that would mock the cheer of their camp fires. "The ever-present shadow," he murmured. "Poor Homespun!"

The Man Who Turned His Back on a Mystery

The Forty-Ninth Talesman

By HOLMAN DAY

Author of "The Red Lane," etc.

Book-Length Novel—Complete in the April 20th issue

GOING into the woods to do battle with himself a man stumbles upon a murder mystery, and deliberately walks away from it—only to find himself compelled to serve as a juror in the murder trial. The murder mystery becomes *the biggest thing in his life,* though he thought the biggest thing was to be the battle with himself, which centered around *"the Siren of the Black Case."* : : :

The Way of the North

By Bertrand W. Sinclair

Author of "Raw Gold," "Piano Jim," Etc.

Here is another problem novel from Sinclair—like "North of Fifty-Three." The problem of another girl who is swept along by life in the midstream of its remorseless drab current till her soul sickens and she stretches out a hand for help. "Was the girl right or wrong?" The same question we asked when we printed Sinclair's story of Big Bill Wagstaff and Hazel. Two or three hundred readers wrote us then. *This* girl's problem ought to bring us double that number of letters. It is a story of the lumber country; and besides the girl, you will find real men to interest you, action to stir your blood, and vivid glimpses of Nature at her best and worst.

CHAPTER I.

GREEN FIELDS AND PASTURES NEW.

THE Imperial Limited lurched with a swing around the last hairpin curve of the Yale Cañon. Ahead opened out a timbered valley, narrow on its floor, flanked with bold mountains; nevertheless a valley down which the rails lay straight and shining on an easy grade. The river that for a hundred miles had boiled and snarled parallel to the tracks, roaring through the granite sluice that cuts the Cascade Range, took a wider channel and a leisurely flow. The mad haste had fallen from it as haste falls from one who, with time to spare, sees his destination near at hand; and the turgid Fraser had time to spare, for now it was but threescore miles to tidewater. So the great river moved placidly—as an old man moves when all the headlong urge of youth is spent and his race near run.

On the river side of the first coach behind the diner, Estella Benton nursed her round chin in the palm of one hand, leaning her elbow on the window sill. It was a relief to look over a widening valley, instead of a bare-walled gorge all scarred with slides, to see wooded heights lift green in place of barren cliffs, to see banks of fern massed against the right of way where for a day and a night parched sagebrush, brown tumbleweed, and such scant growth as flourished in the arid uplands of interior British Columbia had streamed in barren monotony, hot and dry and still.

She was near the last of her journey. Pensively she considered the end of the road. How would it be there? What manner of folk and country? Between her past mode of life and the new that she was hurrying toward, there lay the vast gulf of distance, of custom, of class, even. It was bound to be crude, to be full of inconveniences and uncouthness. Her brother's letters had partly prepared her for that. Involuntarily she shrank from it, had been shrinking from it by fits and starts all the way, as flowers that thrive best in shady nooks shrink from hot sun and

rude winds. Not that Estella Benton was particularly flowerlike. On the contrary, she was a healthy, vigorous-bodied young woman—scarcely to be described as beautiful, yet undeniably attractive. Obviously a daughter of the well-to-do, one of that American type which flourishes in families to which American politicians unctuously refer as the backbone of the nation. Outwardly, gazing riverward through the dusty pane, she bore herself with utmost serenity. Inwardly, she was full of lonely misgivings.

To be shunted alone four days' travel across a continent, to hear the drumming clack of car wheel and rail joint ninety-six hours on end, acutely conscious that every hour of the ninety-six put its due quota of miles between the known and the unknown, may be either an adventure, a bore, or a calamity, depending altogether upon the individual point of view, upon conditioning circumstances and previous experience.

Estella Benton's experience along such lines was chiefly a blank, and the conditioning circumstances of her present journey were somber enough to breed thought that verged upon the melancholy. Save for a natural buoyancy of spirit, she might have wept her way across North America. She had no tried standard by which to measure life's values, for she had lived her twenty-two years wholly shielded from the human maelstrom, fed, clothed, taught, an untried product of home and schools. Her head was full of university-lore, things she had read, a smattering of the arts and philosophy, liberal portions of academic knowledge, all tagged and sorted like parcels on a shelf to be reached when called for. Buried under these externalities, the ego of her lay unaroused, an incalculable quantity.

Just so. But a broken steering knuckle on a heavy touring car set things in a different light—many things. She learned then that death is no respecter of persons, that a big income may be lived to its limit, with nothing left, when the brain force which commanded it ceases to function. Her father produced perhaps fifteen to twenty thousand a year in his brokerage business, and he had nothing laid by. Thus she was at one stroke put on an equal footing with the stenographer in her father's office. Scarcely equal, either, for the stenographer had earned her bread and was technically equipped for the task, whereas Estella Benton had no training whatsoever, except in social usage. She did not yet fully realize just what had overtaken her; things had happened so swiftly, so ruthlessly.

She turned at last in her seat. The limited's whistle had shrilled for a stop. At the next stop—she wondered what lay in store for her just beyond the next stop. While she dwelt mentally upon this, her hands were gathering up some few odds and ends of her belongings on the berth.

Across the aisle, a large, smooth-faced young man watched her with covert admiration. When she had settled back with bag and suit case locked and strapped on the opposite seat, and was hatted and gloved, he leaned over and addressed her genially:

"Getting off at Hopyard? Happen to be going out to Roaring Springs?"

Miss Benton's gray eyes rested on the top of his head, traveled slowly down over the trim front of his blue serge to the polished tan oxfords on his feet, and there was not in eyes nor on countenance the slightest sign that she saw or heard him. The large young man flushed a vivid red.

Within a few minutes of that, the porter came for her things, and the shrill blast of the limited's whistle warned her that it was time to quit the train.

Ten minutes later, the limited was a vanishing object down an aisle slashed

through a forest of great trees, a small dust storm licking up in the wake of the observation car, and Miss Estella Benton stood on the plank platform of Hopyard station. Northward stretched a flat, unlovely vista of fire-blackened stumps. Southward, along track and siding, ranged a single row of buildings, a grocery store, a shanty with a huge sign proclaiming that it was a bank, dwellings, hotels, a blacksmith shop whence arose the clang of hammered iron, all huddling beside each other in a tawdry row. A dirt road ran between town and station, with hitching posts to which farmers' nags stood dispiritedly in harness.

"How could one live in a place like this?" she asked herself hopelessly.

But she had no Slave of the Lamp at her beck, nor any Magic Carpet to transport her elsewhere. At any rate, she reflected, Hopyard was not her abiding place. She hoped that her destination would prove more inviting.

Beside the platform were ranged two touring cars. Three or four of those who had alighted entered these. Their baggage was piled over the hoods, buckled on the running boards. The driver of one car approached her. "Hot Springs?" he inquired tersely.

She affirmed this, and he took her baggage, likewise her trunk check when she asked how that article would be transported to the lake. She had some idea of route and means from her brother's written instruction. She thought he might have been there to meet her. At least, he would be at the Springs.

So there she was, being whirled along a country road. The car whipped a curve and drove into what the fat man from Calgary facetiously remarked upon as the tall uncut. Miss Benton sighted up these noble columns to where a breeze droned in the tops —two hundred feet above. Through a gap in the timber, she saw mountains, peaks that stood bold as the Rockies, capped with snow. For two days, she had been groping for a word to define, to sum up the feeling which had grown upon her, had been growing upon her steadily as the amazing scroll of that four-day journey unrolled. She found it now. A simple word. One of the simplest in our mother tongue. Bigness. Bigness in its most ample sense. That was the dominant note. Immensities of distance, vastness of rolling plain, sheer bulk of mountain, rivers that one crossed, sped on for a day, and crossed again, still far from source or confluence. And now this unending sweep of colossal trees.

At first, she had been overpowered with a sense of insignificance utterly foreign to her previous experience. But now she could vibrate to such a keynote, she discovered, with an agreeable sensation of surprise. And while she communed with this pleasant discovery, the car sped down a straight stretch and stopped short around a corner to unload sacks of mail at a weather-beaten, yellow edifice, its windows displaying indiscriminately Indian baskets, groceries, and hardware. Northward opened a broad scope of lake level, girt about with tremendous peaks, all the lower slopes banked with thick forest.

Somewhere distantly along that lake shore was to be her home. As the car rolled along the four hundred yards between store and white-and-green St. Allwoods, she wondered if Charlie would be there to meet her. She was weary of meeting strange faces, of being directed, of being hustled about.

But he was not there, and she recalled that he had never been notable for punctuality. Five years is a long time. She expected to find him changed —for the better, in certain directions. He had promised to be there. In this respect evidently time had wrought no appreciable transformation.

She registered, was assigned a room, and ate luncheon to the melancholy accompaniment of a three-man orchestra struggling vainly with Bach in an alcove off the dining room. After that, she began to make inquiries. Neither clerk nor manager knew aught of Charlie Benton. They were both in their first season there. They advised her to ask the storekeeper.

"MacDougal will know," they were agreed. "He knows everybody around here, and everything that goes on."

The storekeeper, a genial, round-bodied Scotchman, had the information she desired.

"Charlie Benton?" said he. "No, he'll be at his camp up the lake. He was in three or four days back. I mind now he said he'd be down Thursday—that's to-day. But he isna here yet, or his boat'd be by the wharf yonder."

"Are there any passenger boats that call there?" she asked.

MacDougal shook his head.

"Not reg'lar. There's a gas boat goes t' the head of the lake now an' then. She's away now. Ye might hire a launch. Jack Fyfe's camp tender's about to get under way. But ye wouldna care to go on her, I'm thinkin'. She'll be loaded wi' lumberjacks—every man drunk as a lord, most like. Maybe Benton'll be in before night."

So she went out and walked down the road and out upon the wharf which jutted two hundred yards into the lake.

It stood deserted save for a lone fisherman on the outer end, and an elderly couple that preceded her. Halfway out, she passed a slip beside which lay moored a heavily built fifty-foot boat, scarred with usage, a squat and powerful craft. For sheer, wild, rugged beauty, Roaring Lake surpassed any spot she had ever seen. Its quiet majesty, its air of unbroken peace soothed and comforted her, sick with hurry and swift-footed events.

After a time, she retraced her steps.

Nearing the halfway slip, she saw that a wagon unloading goods blocked the way. A dozen men were stringing in from the road, carrying bundles and bags and rolls of blankets. They were big men mostly, carrying themselves with a reckless swing, with trousers cut off halfway between knee and ankle so that they reached just below the upper of their high-topped, heavy, laced boots. Two or three were singing. All appeared unduly happy, talking loudly, with deep laughter. One threw down his burden and executed a brief clog. Splinters flew where the sharp calks bit into the wharf planking, and his companions applauded.

They began filing down the slip to the boat's deck. One slipped, came near falling into the water, whereat his fellows howled gleefully. Precariously they negotiated the slanting passage. All but one. He sat him down at the sliphead on his bundle and began a quavering chant. The teamster imperturbably finished his unloading, two men meanwhile piling the goods aboard.

The wagon backed out, and the way was clear save for the logger sitting on his blankets wailing his lugubrious song. From below, his fellows urged him to come along. A bell clanged in the pilot house. The exhaust of a gas engine began to sputter through the boat's side. From her after deck a man hailed the logger sharply, and when his call was unheeded he ran lightly up the slip. A short, squarely built man he was, light on his feet as a dancing master.

He spoke now with authority, impatiently:

"Hurry aboard, Mike; we're waiting!"

The logger rose, waved his hand airily, and turned away as if to retreat down the wharf. The other caught him by the arm and spun him face to the slip.

"Come on, Slater!" he said evenly. "I have no time to fool around."

The logger drew back his fist. He was a fairly big man. But if he had in mind to deal a blow, it failed, for the other ducked and caught him with both arms around the middle. He lifted the logger clear of the wharf, hoisted him to the level of his breast, and heaved him down the slip as one would throw a sack of bran.

The man's body bounced on the incline, rolled, slid, tumbled till at length he brought up against the boat's guard, and all that saved him a ducking was the prompt extension of several stout arms, which clutched and hauled him to the flush after deck. He sat on his haunches, blinking. Then he laughed. So did the man at the top of the slip, and the lumberjacks clustered on the boat. Homeric laughter, as at some surpassing jest. But the roar of him who had taken that inglorious descent rose loudest of all, an explosive "Har—har—har!"

Stella's disgusted gaze followed the camp tender as it swung around the wharf end, and so her roaming gaze led to another craft drawing quietly near. This might be her brother's vessel. She went back to the outer landing to see.

Two men manned this boat. As she ranged alongside the piles, one stood forward and the other aft, with lines to make fast. She cast a look at each. They were prototypes of the rude crew but now departed, brown-faced, flannel-shirted, shod with calked boots, unshaven for days, typical men of the woods. But as she turned to go, the man forward and almost directly below her looked her full in the face.

"Stell!"

She leaned over the rail.

"Charlie Benton—for Heaven's sake!"

They stared at each other.

"Well!" he laughed at last. "If it were not for your mouth and eyes, Stell, I wouldn't have known you. Why, you're all grown up!"

He clambered to the wharf level and kissed her. The rough stubble of his beard pricked her tender skin, and she drew back.

"My word, Charlie, you certainly ought to shave!" she observed, with sisterly frankness. "I didn't know you until you spoke. I'm awfully glad to see you, but you do need *some one* to look after you."

Benton laughed tolerantly.

"Perhaps. But, my dear girl, a fellow doesn't get anywhere on his appearance in this country. When a fellow's bucking big timber, he shucks off a lot of things he used to think were quite essential. But, by Jove, you're a picture, Stell! If I hadn't been expecting to see you, I wouldn't have known you."

"I doubt if I should have known you, either," she returned dryly.

CHAPTER II.

MR. ABBEY ARRIVES.

Stella accompanied her brother to the store, where he gave an order for sundry goods. Then they went to the hotel to see if her trunks had arrived. Near the white fence which inclosed the grounds of St. Allwoods, a man hailed Benton, drew him a few steps aside. They spoke briefly. Stella walked slowly on, and presently her brother joined her.

The baggage wagon had brought the trunks, and when she had paid her bill they were delivered at the outer wharf end, where also arrived at about the same time a miscellaneous assortment of supplies from the store and a Japanese with her two hand bags. So far as Miss Estella Benton could see, she was about to embark on the last stage of her journey.

"How soon will you start?" she in-

quired, when the last of the stuff was stowed aboard the little steamer.

"Twenty minutes or so," Benton answered. "Say," he went on casually, "have you got any money, Stell? I owe a fellow twenty dollars, and I left the bank roll and my check book at camp."

Miss Benton drew the purse from her hand bag and gave it to him. He pocketed it and went off down the wharf, with the brief assurance that he would be gone only a minute or so.

The minute, however, lengthened to close on an hour, and Sam Davis had his blow-off valve hissing, and Stella Benton was casting impatient glances shoreward before Charlie strolled leisurely back.

"You needn't fire up quite so strong, Sam," he called down. "We won't start for a couple of hours yet."

"Sufferin' Moses!" Davis poked his fiery thatch out from the engine room. "I might 'a' known better'n to sweat over firin' up. You generally manage to make about three false starts to one get-away."

Benton laughed good-naturedly and turned away.

"Why the delay, though?" Stella insisted. "I thought you were all ready to go."

"I am," Charlie enlightened. "But while I was at the store just now, Paul Abbey phoned from Vancouver to know if there was an uplake boat in. His people are big lumber guns here, and it will accommodate him and won't hurt me to wait a couple of hours and drop him off at their camp. I've got more or less business dealings with them, and it doesn't hurt to be neighborly. He'd have to hire a gas boat otherwise. Besides, Paul's a pretty good head."

They walked slowly along the broad roadway which bordered the lake until they came to a branchy maple, and here they seated themselves on the grassy turf in the shadow of the tree.

"Tell me about yourself," she said. "How do you like it here, and how are you getting on? Your letters home were always chiefly remarkable for their brevity."

"There isn't a great lot to tell," Benton responded. "I'm just beginning to get on my feet. A raw, untried youngster has a lot to learn and unlearn when he hits this tall timber. I've been out here five years, and I'm just beginning to realize what I'm equal to and what I'm not. I'm crawling over a hump now that would have been a lot easier if the governor hadn't come to grief the way he did. He was going to put in some money this fall. But I think I'll make it, anyway, though it will keep me digging and figuring. I have a contract for delivery of a million feet in September, and another contract that I can take up if I could see my way clear to finance the thing. I could clean up thirty thousand dollars net in two years if I had more cash to work on. As it is, I have to go slow, or I'd go broke. I'm holding two limits by the skin of my teeth. But I've got one good one practically for an annual pittance. If I make delivery on my contract according to schedule, it's plain sailing. That about sizes up my prospects, sis."

"You speak a language I don't understand." She smiled. "What does a million feet mean? And what's a limit?"

"A limit is one square mile—six hundred and forty acres, more or less, of merchantable timberland," he explained. "We speak of timber as scaling so many board feet. A board foot is one inch thick by twelve inches square. Sound fir timber is worth around seven dollars a thousand board feet in the log, got out of the woods and boomed in the water, ready to tow to the mills. The first limit I got—from the government—will scale around ten million feet. The other two are nearly as good. But

I got them from timber speculators, and it's costing me pretty high. They're a good spec if I can hang onto them, though."

"It sounds big," she commented.

"It *is* big," Charlie declared, "if I could go at it right. I've been trying ever since I got wise to this timber business to make the governor see what a chance there is in it. He was just getting properly impressed with the possibilities when the speed bug got him. He could have trimmed a little here and there at home, and put the money to work. Ten thousand dollars would have done the trick, given me a working outfit along with what I've got that would have put us both on Easy Street. However, the poor old chap didn't get around to it. I suppose, like lots of other business men, when he stopped everything ran down. According to Lander's account, there won't be a thing left when all accounts are squared."

"Don't talk about it, Charlie," she begged. "It's too near, and I was through it all."

"I would have been there, too," Benton said. "But, as I told you, I was out of reach of your wire, and by the time I got it, it was all over. I couldn't have done any good, anyway. There's no use mourning. One way and another, we've all got to come to it some day."

Stella looked out over the placid, shimmering surface of Roaring Lake for a minute. The source of her grief was dimming with time and distance, and she had all her own young life before her. She found herself drifting from painful memories of her father's sudden death to a consideration of things present and personal. She found herself wondering critically if this strange, rude land would work as many changes in her as were patent in this bronzed and burly brother.

He had left home a slim, cocksure youngster, who had proved more than a handful for his family before he was half through college—which educational finishing process had come to an abrupt stop before it was near complete. He had been a problem that her father and mother had discussed in guarded tones. Sending him West had been a hopeful experiment—and in the West that abounding spirit which manifested in one continual round of minor escapades appeared to have found a natural outlet. She recalled that latterly their father had taken to speaking of Charlie in accents of pride. He was developing the one ambition that Benton, senior, could thoroughly understand and properly appreciate, the desire to get on, to grasp opportunities, to achieve material success, to make money.

"Are there many people living around this lake?" she inquired. "It is surely a beautiful spot. If we had this at home, there would be a summer cottage on every hundred yards of shore."

"Be a long time before we get to that stage here," Benton returned. "And scenery in B. C. is a drug on the market—we've got Europe backed off the map for tourist attractions, if they only knew it. No, about the only summer home in this locality is the Abbey place, at Cottonwood Point. They come up here every summer for two or three months. Otherwise, I don't know of any lilies of the field, barring the hotel people, and they, being purely transient, don't count. There's the Abbey-Monohan outfit, with two big logging camps, my outfit, Jack Fyfe's, some hand loggers on the east shore, and the R. A. T. at the head of the lake. That's the population—and Roaring Lake is forty-two miles long and eight wide."

"Are there any nice girls around?" she asked.

Benton grinned widely.

"Girls?" said he. "Not so you could notice. Outside the Springs, and the

hatchery over the way, there isn't a white woman on the lake except Lefty Howe's wife—Lefty's Jack Fyfe's foreman—and she's fat and past forty. I told you it was a God-forsaken hole as far as society is concerned, Stell."

"I know," she said thoughtfully. "But one can scarcely realize such a—such a social blankness until one actually experiences it. Anyway, I don't know but I'll appreciate utter quietness for a while. But what do you do with yourself when you're not working?"

"There's seldom any such time," he answered. "I tell you, Stella, I've got a big job on my hands. I've got a definite mark to shoot at, and I'm going to make a bull's-eye in spite of hell and high water. I have no time to play, and there's no place to play if I had. I don't intend to muddle along making a pittance like a hand logger. I want a stake—and then it'll be time to make a splurge in a country where a man can get a run for his money."

"If that's the case," she observed, "I'm likely to be a handicap to you, am I not?"

"Lord, no!" He smiled. "I'll put you to work, too, when you get rested up from your trip. You stick to me, sis, and you'll wear diamonds."

She laughed with him at this, and, leaving the shady maple, they walked up to the hotel, where Benton proposed that they get a canoe and paddle to where Roaring River flowed out of the lake, a half mile westward, to kill the time that must elapse before the three-thirty train.

The St. Allwoods' car was rolling out to Hopyard when they came back. By the time Benton had turned the canoe over to the boathouse man and reached the wharf, the horn of the returning machine sounded down the road. They waited. The car came to a stop at the abutting wharf. The driver handed two suit cases off the burdened hood of his machine. From out the tonneau clambered a large, smooth-faced young man. He wore an expansive smile, in addition to blue serge suit, white panama hat, and polished tan oxfords, and he bestowed a hearty greeting upon Charlie Benton. But his smile was eclipsed, and a faint flush rose in his round cheeks, when his eyes fell upon Benton's sister.

CHAPTER III.

HALFWAY POINT.

Miss Benton's cool, impersonal manner seemed rather to heighten the young man's embarrassment. Benton, apparently observing nothing amiss, introduced them in an offhand fashion:

"Mr. Abbey—my sister."

Mr. Abbey bowed, and murmured something that passed for acknowledgment. The three turned up the wharf toward where Sam Davis had once more got up steam, and, as they walked, Mr. Abbey's habitual assurance returned, and he directed part of his genial flow of conversation to Miss Benton. He did not, however, to Stella's inner amusement, make any reference to their having been fellow travelers for a day and a half.

Presently they were embarked, and under way. Charlie fixed a seat for her on the aft deck and went himself forward to steer, whither he was straightway joined by Paul Abbey. Miss Benton was as well pleased to be alone. She was not sure she should approve of young men who made such crude efforts to scrape acquaintance with women on trains. She was accustomed to a certain amount of formality in such matters. It might, perhaps, be laid to the "breezy Western manner" of which she had heard, except that Paul Abbey did not impress her as a Westerner. He seemed more like a type of young man she had encountered frequently in her own circle. At any rate, she was relieved when he did not

remain beside her to emit polite commonplaces. She was quite satisfied to sit by herself and look over the panorama of woods and lake, and wonder more than a little what destiny had in store for her along those silent shores.

The *Chickamin* cleared Echo Island, and a greater sweep of lake opened out. Here the afternoon wind sprang up, shooting gustily through a gap between the Springs and Hopyard, and ruffling the lake out of its noonday siesta. Ripples, chop, and a growing swell followed each other with that marvelous rapidity common to large bodies of fresh water. It broke the monotony of steady cleaving through dead calm. Stella was a good sailor, and she rather enjoyed it when the *Chickamin* began to lift by the stern and yaw off before the following seas that ran up under her fantail stern.

About an hour's run, with the south wind beginning to whip the crests of the short seas into white foam, the boat bore into a landing behind a low point. Here, Abbey disembarked, after taking the trouble to come aft and shake hands with polite farewell. Standing on the float, hat in hand, he bowed his sleek blond head to Stella.

"I hope you'll like Roaring Lake, Miss Benton," he said, as Benton jingled the go-ahead bell. "I tried to persuade Charlie to stop over a while, so you could meet my mother and sister, but he's in too big a hurry. Hope to have the pleasure of meeting you again soon."

Miss Benton parried courteously, a little at a loss to fathom this bland friendliness, and presently the widening space cut off their talk. As the boat drew offshore, she saw two women in white come down toward the float, meet Abbey, and turn back; and a little farther out, through an opening in the woods, she saw a white-and-green bungalow, low and rambling, wide-verandaed, set on a hillock three hundred yards back from shore. There was an encircling area of smooth lawn, a place restfully inviting.

Watching that, seeing a figure or two moving about, she was smitten with a recurrence of that poignant loneliness which had assailed her fitfully in the last four days; and while the *Chickamin* was still plowing the inshore waters on an even keel, she walked the guard rail alongside, and joined her brother in the pilot house.

"Isn't that a pretty place back there in the woods?" she remarked.

"Abbey's summer camp—spells money to me, that's all," Charlie grumbled. "It's a toy for their women—up-to-date cottage, gardeners, tennis courts, afternoon tea on the lawn for the guests, and all that. But the Abbey-Monohan bunch has the money to do what they want to do. They've made it in timber, as I expect to make mine. You didn't particularly want to stay over and get acquainted, did you?"

"I? Of course not!" she responded.

"Personally, I don't want to mix into their social game," Charlie drawled, "or at least I don't propose to make any tentative advances. The women put on lots of side, they say. If they want to hunt us up, and cultivate you, all right; but I've got too much to do to butt into society. Anyway, I didn't want to run up against any critical females looking like I do right now."

Stella smiled.

"Under certain circumstances, appearances do count, then, in this country?" she remarked. "Has your Mr. Abbey got a young and be-yutiful sister?"

"He has. But that's got nothing to do with it," Charlie retorted. "Paul's all right himself, but their gait isn't mine—not yet. Here, you take the wheel a minute. I want to smoke. I don't suppose you ever helmed a forty-footer, but you'll never learn younger."

She took the wheel. Charlie stood

by, directing her. In twenty minutes, they were out where the run of the sea from the south had a fair sweep. The wind was whistling now. All the roughened surface was spotted with whitecaps. The *Chickamin* would hang on the crest of a wave and shoot forward like a racer, her wheel humming, and again the roller would run out from under her and she would labor heavily in the trough.

Far ahead loomed a ridge running down to the lake shore and cutting off in a bold promontory. That was Halfway Point, Charlie had told her, and under its shadow lay his camp. Without any previous knowledge of camps, she was approaching this one with less eager anticipation than when she began her long journey. She began to fear that it might be totally unlike anything she had been able to imagine it to be, disagreeably so. Charlie, she decided, had grown hard and coarsened in the evolution of his ambition to get on —to make his pile. She was but four years younger than he, and she had always thought of herself as being older and wiser and steadier. She had conceived the idea that her presence would have a good influence on him, that they would pull together—now that there were but the two of them. But four hours in his company had dispelled that illusion. She had the wit to perceive that Charlie Benton had emerged from the chrysalis stage, that he had the will and the ability to mold his life after his elected fashion, and that her coming was a relatively unimportant incident.

In due course, the *Chickamin* bore in under Halfway Point, opened out a sheltered bight where the watery commotion outside raised but a faint ripple, and drew in alongside a float.

The girl swept lake shore, bay, and sloping forest with a quickening eye. Here was no trim, painted cottage and velvet lawn. In the waters beside, and lining the beach, floated innumerable logs, confined by boom sticks—hundreds of trunks of fir, forty and sixty feet long, four and six feet across the butt—timber enough, when it had passed through the sawmills, to build four such towns as Hopyard. Just back from the shore, amid stumps and littered branches, rose the roofs of divers buildings. One was long and low. Hard by it stood another of like type but of lesser dimension. Two or three mere shanties lifted level with great stumps, crude, unpainted buildings. Smoke issued from the pipe of the larger, and a white-aproned man stood in the doorway.

Somewhere in the screen of woods behind, a whistle shrilled. Benton looked at his watch.

"We made good time, in spite of the little roll," said he. "That's the donkey blowing quitting time—six o'clock. Well, come on up to the shack, sis. Sam, you get a wheelbarrow and run those trunks up after supper, will you?"

Away in the banked timber beyond the maples and alder, which Stella now saw masked the bank of a small stream flowing by the cabins, a faint call rose, long drawn:

"Tim-ber-r-r-r!"

They moved along a path beaten through fern and clawing blackberry vine toward the camp, Benton carrying the two grips. A loud, sharp crack split the stillness, then a mild swishing sound arose. Hard on the heels of that followed a rending, tearing crash, a thud that sent tremors through the solid earth under their feet. The girl started.

"Falling gang dropped a big fir." Charlie laughed. "You'll get used to that, too. You'll hear it a good many times a day here."

"Good heavens! It sounded like the end of the world!" she said.

"Well, you can't fall a stick of timber two hundred feet high, and six or eight feet through, without making a pretty considerable noise," her brother re-

marked complacently. "I like that sound, myself. Every big tree that goes down means a bunch of money."

He led the way past the mess house, from the doorway of which the aproned cook eyed her with frank curiosity, hailing his employer with nonchalant air, a cigarette resting in one corner of his mouth. Benton opened the door of the second building. Stella followed him in.

It had the saving grace of cleanliness —according to logging-camp standards —but the bareness of it appalled her. There was a rusty box heater, littered with cigar and cigarette stubs, a desk fabricated of undressed boards, a home-made chair or two, sundry boxes standing about. The sole concession to comfort was a rug of cheap Axminster covering half the floor. The walls were decorated chiefly with miscellaneous clothing suspended from nails, a few maps and blue prints tacked up askew. Straight across from the entering door another stood ajar, and she could see further vistas of bare board wall, small, dusty windowpanes, and a bed whereon gray blankets were tumbled as they fell when a waking sleeper cast them aside.

Benton crossed the room and threw open another door.

"Here's a nook I fixed up for you, Stella," he said briskly. "It isn't very fancy, but it's the best I could do just now."

She followed him in silently. He set her two bags on the floor and turned to go. Then some impulse moved him to turn back, and he put both hands on her shoulders and kissed her gently.

"You're home, anyway," he said. "That's something if it isn't what you're used to. Try to overlook the crudities. We'll have supper as soon as you feel like it."

He went out, closing the door behind him.

Miss Estella Benton stood in the middle of the room, fighting against a swift heart sinking, a terrible depression that strove to master her. "Good Lord in heaven!" she muttered at last. "What a place to be marooned in! It's—it's simply impossible!"

Her gaze roved about the room. A square box, neither more nor less, fourteen by fourteen feet of bare board wall, unpainted and unpapered. There was an iron bed, a willow rocker, and a rude closet for clothes in one corner. A duplicate of the department-store bargain rug in the other room lay on the floor. On an upturned box stood an enamel pitcher and a tin washbasin. That was all.

She sat down on the bed and viewed it forlornly. A wave of sickening rebellion against everything swept over her. To herself, she seemed as irrevocably alone as if she had been lost in the depths of the dark timber that rose on every hand; and, sitting there, she heard at length the voices of men. Looking out through a window curtained with cheesecloth, she saw her brother's logging gang swing past, stout woodsmen all, big men, tall men, short-bodied men with thick necks and shoulders, sunburned, all grimy with the sweat of their labors, carrying themselves with a free and reckless swing, the doubles in type of that roistering crew she had seen embark that day on Jack Fyfe's boat.

She watched them cluster before the cookhouse by a bench, dabble their faces and hands in washbasins, scrub themselves promiscuously on towels, sometimes one at each end of a single piece of cloth, hauling it back and forth in rude play.

CHAPTER IV.

A FORETASTE OF THINGS TO COME.

Half an hour later, she sat down with her brother at one end of a table that was but a long bench covered with oilcloth. Chairs there were none. A narrow, movable bench on each side of

the fixed table furnished seating capacity for twenty men, provided none objected to an occasional nudging from his neighbor's elbow. The dishes were different from any she had ever eaten from—enormously thick porcelain of dead white, variously chipped, and cracked with fine seams. But the food, if plain, was of excellent quality, tastily cooked. She discovered herself with an appetite wholly independent of silver and cut glass and linen. The tin spoons and steel knives and forks harrowed her æsthetic sense without impairing her ability to satisfy hunger.

They had the dining room to themselves. Through a single ship-lap partition rose a rumble of masculine talk, where the logging crew loafed in their bunk house. The cook served them without any frills, putting everything on the table at once—soup, meat, vegetables, a bread pudding for dessert, coffee in a tall tin pot. Benton introduced him to his sister. He withdrew hastily to the kitchen, and they saw no more of him.

"Charlie," the girl said plaintively, when the man had closed the door behind him, "I don't quite fathom your social customs out here. Is one supposed to know everybody that one encounters?"

"Just about," he grinned. "Loggers, Siwashes, and the natives in general. Can't very well help it, sis. There's so few people in this neck of the woods that nobody can afford to be exclusive—at least nobody who lives here any length of time. You can't tell when you may have to call on your neighbor or the fellow working for you in a matter of life and death, almost. A man couldn't possibly maintain the same attitude toward a bunch of loggers working under him that would be considered proper back where we came from."

"I see," she observed thoughtfully. "One's compelled by circumstances to practice democracy."

"Something like that," he responded carelessly, and went on eating his supper.

"Don't you think we could make this place a lot more homelike, Charlie?" she ventured, when they were back in their own quarters. "I suppose it suits a man, who only uses it as a place to sleep, but it's bare as a barn."

Benton stuffed the bowl of a pipe and lighted it before he essayed reply.

"Look here, Stella," he said earnestly, "this joint probably strikes you as about the limit, seeing that you've been used to pretty soft surroundings and getting pretty nearly anything you wanted whenever you expressed a wish for it. Things that you've grown into the way of considering as necessities *are* luxuries, and they're out of the question for us at present. I got a pretty hard seasoning the first two years I was in this country, and when I set up this camp it was merely a place to live. I never thought anything about it as being comfortable or otherwise until you elected to come. I'm not in a position to go in for trimmings. Rough as this camp is, it will have to go as it stands this summer. I'm up against it for ready money. I've got none due until I make delivery of those logs in September, and I have to have that million feet in the water in order to make delivery. Every one of these men but the cook and the donkey engineer are working for me with their wages deferred until then. There are certain expenses that must be met with cash—and I've got all my funds figured down to nickels. If I get by on this contract, I'll have a few hundred to squander on house things. Until then, it's the simple life for us. You can camp for three or four months, can't you, without finding it completely unbearable?"

"Why, of course!" she protested. "I wasn't complaining about the way things are. I merely voiced the idea that it would be nice to fix up a little

cozier—make these rooms look a little homelike. I didn't know you were practically compelled to live like this as a matter of economy."

"Well, in a sense, I am," he replied. "And then, again, making a place away out here homelike never struck me as being anything but an inconsequential detail. I'm not trying to make a home here. I'm after a bundle of money. A while ago, if you had been here, and suggested it, you could have spent five or six hundred, and I wouldn't have missed it. But this contract came my way, and gave me a chance to clean up three thousand dollars clear profit in four months. I grabbed it, and I find it's some undertaking. I'm dealing with a hard business outfit, hard as nails. I might get the banks or some capitalist to finance me, because my timber holdings are worth money, but I'm shy of that. I've noticed that when a logger starts working on borrowed capital he generally goes broke. The financiers generally devise some way to hook him. I prefer to sail as close to the wind as I can on what little I've got. I can get this timber out—but it wouldn't look nice, now would it, for me to be buying furniture when I'm standing these boys off for their wages till September?"

"I should have been a man," Miss Estella Benton pensively remarked. "Then I could put on overalls and make myself useful, instead of being a drone. There doesn't seem to be anything here I could do. I could keep house—only you haven't any house to keep, therefore no need of a housekeeper. Why, who's that?"

Her ear had caught a low, throaty laugh, a woman's laugh, outside. She looked inquiringly at her brother. His expression remained absent, as of one concentrated upon his own problems. She repeated the question.

"That? Oh, Katy John, I suppose, or her mother," he answered. "Siwash bunch, camping around the point. The girl does some washing for us now and then. I suppose she's after Matt for some bread or something."

Stella looked out. At the cookhouse door stood a short, plump-bodied girl, dark-skinned and black-haired. Otherwise, she conformed to none of Miss Benton's preconceived ideas of the aboriginal inhabitant. If she had been pinned down, she would probably have expected to behold an Indian maiden, garbed in beaded buckskin and brass ornaments. Instead, Katy John wore a white sailor blouse, a brown pleated skirt, tan shoes, and a bow of baby-blue ribbon in her hair.

"Why, she talks good English!" Miss Benton exclaimed, as fragments of the girl's speech floated over to her.

"Sure! As good as anybody," Charlie drawled. "Why not?"

"Well—er—I suppose my notion of Indians is rather vague," Stella admitted. "Are they all civilized and educated?"

"Most of 'em," Benton replied. "The younger generation, anyhow. Say, Stell, can you cook?"

"A little," Stella rejoined guardedly. "Why do you ask?"

"Why, your wail about being a man and putting on overalls and digging in reminded me that, if you liked, you might have a chance to get on your apron and show us what you can do," he laughed. "Matt's about due to go on a tear. He's been on the water wagon now about his limit. The first man that comes along with a bottle of whisky, Matt will quit and head for town. I was wondering if you and Katy John could keep the gang from starving to death if that happened. The last time I had to get in and cook for two weeks myself, and I can't run a logging crew from the cook shanty very well."

"I dare say I could manage," Stella returned dubiously. "This seems to be a terrible place for drinking. Is it the

accepted thing to get drunk at all times and in public?"

"It's about the only excitement there is," Benton smiled tolerantly. "I guess there is no more drinking out here than any other part of this North American continent. Only a man here gets drunk openly and riotously, without any effort to hide it, and without it being considered anything but a natural lapse. That's one thing you'll have to get used to out here, Stell—I mean, that what vices men have are all on the surface. We don't get drunk secretly at the club and sneak home in a taxi. Oh, well, we'll cross the bridge when we come to it. Matt may not break out for weeks."

He yawned openly.

"Sleepy?" Stella inquired.

"I get up every morning between four and five," he replied, "and I can go to sleep any time after supper."

"I think I'll take a walk along the beach," she said abruptly.

"All right. Don't hike into the woods and get lost, though."

She circled the segment of bay, climbed a low, rocky point, and found herself a seat on a fallen tree. Outside, the lake heaved uneasily, still dotted with whitecaps whipped up by the southerly gale. At her feet, surge after surge hammered the gravelly shore. Far through the woods behind her, the wind whistled and hummed among swaying tops of giant fir and cedar. There was a heady freshness in that rollicking wind, an odor resinous and pungent mingled with that elusive smell of green growing stuff along the shore. Beginning where she sat, tree trunks rose in immense brown pillars, running back in great forest naves, shadowy always, floored with green moss laid in a rich, soft carpet for the wood sprites' feet. Far beyond the long, gradual lower slope lifted a range of saw-backed mountains, the sanctuary of wild goat and bear, and across the rolling lake lifted other mountains sheer from the water's edge, peaks lifting above timber line in majestic contour, their pinnacle crests grazing the clouds that scudded before the south wind.

She nursed her chin in her hand and pondered her situation. She was there, and perforce she must stay there. She had no funds to go elsewhere—nor training in the harsh business of gaining a livelihood if she went elsewhere. For the first time, she began dully to resent the manner of her upbringing. Once she had desired to enter hospital training, had been properly enthusiastic over a career in this field of mercy for a period of months. Then, as now, marriage, while accepted as the ultimate state, was only to be considered through a haze of idealism and romanticism.

It was too late to mourn over lost opportunities now, but she did wish there was some one thing she could do, and do well; some service of value that would guarantee self-support. If she could only pound a typewriter, or keep a set of books, or even make a passable attempt at sewing, she would have felt vastly more at ease in this rude logging camp, knowing that she could leave it if she desired.

So far as she could see things, she looked at them with measurable clearness, without any vain illusions concerning her ability to march triumphant over unknown fields of endeavor. Along practical lines, she had everything to learn. Culture furnishes an excellent pair of wings wherewith to soar in skies of abstraction, but is a poor vehicle to carry one over rough roads. She might have remained in Philadelphia, a guest among friends. Pride forbade that. Incidentally, such an arrangement would have enabled her to stalk a husband, a moneyed husband—which did not occur to her at all. There remained only to join Charlie. If his fortunes mended, well and good. Perhaps she could even help in minor ways.

But it was all so radically different—brother and all—from what she had pictured that she was filled with dismay, and not a little foreboding of the future. Sufficient, however, unto the day was the evil thereof, she told herself at last, and tried to make that assurance work a change of heart. She was very lonely and depressed, and full of a futile wish that she were a man.

Her wandering gaze at length came to rest on a tent top showing in the brush northward from the camp. She saw two canoes drawn up on the beach, above the lash of the small waves; two small figures playing on the gravel, and sundry dogs prowling along shore. Smoke went eddying away in the wind. The Siwash camp, where Katy John hailed from, Miss Benton supposed.

She had an impulse to skirt the bay and view the Indian camp at closer range, a notion born of curiosity. She debated this casually, and just as she was about to rise, her movement was arrested by a faint crackle in the woods behind. She looked away through the deepening shadow among the trees, and saw nothing at first. But the sound was repeated at odd intervals. She sat still. Thoughts of forest animals slipped into her mind, without making her afraid. At last she caught sight of a man striding through the timber soundlessly on the thick moss, coming almost straight toward her.

He was scarcely fifty yards away. Across his shoulders he bore a reddish-gray burden and in his right hand a gun. She did not move. Bowed slightly under the weight, the man passed within twenty feet of her, so close that she could see the sweat beads glisten on that side of his face, and saw, also, that the load he carried was the carcass of a deer.

Gaining the beach, and laying the animal across a bowlder, he straightened himself up and drew a long breath. Then he wiped the sweat off his face. She recognized him as the man who had thrown the logger down the slip that day at noon, presumably Jack Fyfe. A sturdily built man, about thirty, of Saxon fairness, with a tinge of red in his hair and a liberal display of freckles across nose and cheek bones. He was no beauty, she decided, albeit he displayed a frank and pleasing countenance. That he was a remarkably strong and active man, she had seen for herself, and, if the firm round of his jaw counted for anything, an individual of considerable determination besides. Miss Benton conceived herself to be possessed of considerable skill at character analysis.

He put away his handkerchief, took up his rifle, settled his hat, and strode off toward the camp. Her attention now diverted from the Siwashes, she watched him, saw him go to her brother's quarters, stand in the door a minute, then go back to the beach, accompanied by Charlie.

In a minute or so, he came rowing across in a skiff, threw his deer aboard, and pulled away north along the shore.

She watched him lift and fall among the waves until he turned a point, rowing with strong, even strokes. Then she walked home. Benton was poring over some figures, but he pushed aside his pencil and paper when she entered.

"You had a visitor, I see," she remarked.

"Yes; Jack Fyfe. He picked up a deer on the ridge behind here, and borrowed a boat to get home."

"I saw him come out of the woods," she said. "His camp can't be far from here, is it? He only left the Springs as you came in. Does he hunt deer for sport?"

"Hardly. Oh, well, I suppose it's sport for Jack, in a way. He's always piking around in the woods with a gun or a fishing rod," Benton returned. "But we kill 'em to eat, mostly. It's good meat, and cheap. I get one my-

self, now and then. However, you want to keep that under your hat—about us fellows hunting—or we'll have game wardens nosing around here."

"Are you not allowed to hunt them?" she asked.

"Not in close season. Hunting season's from September to December."

"If it's unlawful, why break the law?" she ventured hesitatingly. "Isn't that rather—er——"

"Oh, bosh!" Charlie derided. "A man in the woods is entitled to venison if he's hunter enough to get it. The woods are full of deer, and a few more or less don't matter. We can't run forty miles to town and back and pay famine prices for beef every two or three days, when we can get it at home in the woods."

Stella digested this in silence, but it occurred to her that this mild sample of lawlessness was quite in keeping with the men and the environment.

Dusk was falling now, the long twilight of the northern seasons gradually deepening as they sat in silence. Along the creek bank arose the evening chorus of the frogs. The air, now hushed and still, was riven every few minutes by the whir of wings as ducks, in evening flight, swept by above. All the boisterous laughter and talk had died in the bunk house. The woods ranged gloomy and impenetrable, save only in the northwest, where a patch of sky, lighted by diffused pink and gray, revealed a great mountain standing bald against the horizon.

"Well, I guess it's time to turn in." Benton muffled a yawn. "Pleasant dreams, sis. Oh, here's your purse! I used part of the bank roll. You won't have much use for money up here, anyway."

He flipped the purse across to her and sauntered into his bedroom. Stella sat gazing thoughtfully at the vast bulk of Mount Douglas a few minutes longer. Then she, too, went into her boxlike room, the bare discomfort of which chilled her merely to behold.

With a curious uncertainty, a feeling of reluctance for the proceeding, almost, she examined the contents of her purse. For a little time she stood gazing into it, a queer curl to her full red lips. Then she flung it contemptuously on the bed and began to take down her hair.

"'A rich, rough, tough country, where it doesn't do to be finicky about anything,'" she murmured, quoting a line from one of Charlie Benton's letters. "It would appear to be rather unpleasantly true—particularly the last clause."

In her purse, which had contained one hundred and ten dollars, there now reposed, in solitary state, a twenty-dollar bill.

CHAPTER V.

THE TOLL OF BIG TIMBER.

Day came again, in the natural sequence of events. Matt the cook roused all the camp at six o'clock with a tremendous banging on a piece of boiler plate hung by a wire. Long before that Stella heard her brother astir. She wondered sleepily at his sprightliness, for as she remembered him at home he had been a confirmed lie-abed. She herself responded none too quickly to the breakfast gong, as a result of which slowness, when she entered the mess-house, the crew had filed away to the day's work, her brother striding in the lead.

She killed time with partial success till noon. Several times she was startled to momentary attention by the prolonged series of sharp cracks which heralded the thunderous crash of a falling tree. There were other sounds which betokened the loggers' activity in the near-by forest, the ringing whine of saw blades, the dull stroke of the ax, voices calling distantly.

She tried to interest herself in the

camp and the beach, and ended up by sitting on a log in a shady spot, staring dreamily over the lake.

She beheld the noon return of the crew much as a shipwrecked castaway on a desert shore might behold a rescuing sail—and she told Charlie that she intended to go into the woods that afternoon and watch them work.

"All right," he said. "Just so you don't get in the way of a falling tree."

A narrow fringe of brush and scrubby timber separated the camp from the actual work. From the water's edge to the donkey engine it was barely four hundred yards. From donkey to a ten-foot jump-off on the lake shore in a straight line on a five-per-cent gradient ran a curious roadway, made by placing two logs in the hollow scooped by tearing great timbers over the soft earth, and a bigger log on each side. Butt to butt and side to side, the outer sticks half their thickness above the inner, they formed a continuous trough, the bottom and sides worn smooth with friction of sliding timbers. Stella had crossed it the previous evening and wondered what it was. Now, watching them at work, she saw. Also, she saw why the great stumps that rose in every clearing in this land of massive trees were sawn six and eight feet above the ground. Always at the base the firs swelled sharply. Wherefore the falling gangs lifted themselves above the enlargement to make their cut.

Two sawyers attacked a tree. First with a double-bitted ax, each drove a deep notch into the sapwood just wide enough to take the end of a two-by-six plank four or five foot long with a single grab nail in the end—the springboard of the Pacific-coast logger, whose daily business lies among the biggest timber on God's footstool. Each then clambered up on his precarious perch, took hold of his end of the long, limber saw, and cut in to a depth of a foot or more, according to the size of the tree. Then jointly they chopped down to this sawn line, and there was the undercut complete, a deep notch on the side to which the tree would fall. That done, they swung the ends of their springboards, or, if it were a thick trunk, made new holding notches on the other side, and the long saw would eat steadily through the heart of the tree toward that yellow-gashed undercut, stroke upon stroke, ringing with a thin metallic twang. Presently there would arise an ominous cracking. High in the air the tall crest would dip slowly, as if it bowed with manifest reluctance to the inevitable. The sawyers would drop lightly from their springboards, crying:

"Tim-br-r-r-r!"

The earthward swoop of the upper boughs would hasten till the air was full of a whistling, whishing sound. Then the rending crash as the great tree smashed prone, crushing what small timber stood in its path, and the earth-quivering shock of its impact with the soil.

Once down, the fallers went on to another. Immediately the swampers fell upon the prone trunk with axes, denuding it of limbs; the buckers followed them to saw it in lengths decreed by the boss logger. When the job was done the brown fir was no longer a stately tree, but saw logs, each with the square butt that lay donkeyward, trimmed a trifle rounding with the ax.

Benton worked one falling gang. The falling gang raced to keep ahead of the buckers and swampers, and they in turn raced to keep ahead of the hook tender, rigging slinger, and donkey—which last trio moved the logs from woods to water once they were down and trimmed. Terrible, devastating forces of destruction they seemed to Stella Benton, wholly unused as she was to any woodland save well-kept parks and little areas of groomed for-

est in her native State. All about in the ravaged woods lay the big logs, scores of them. They had only begun to pull with the donkey a week earlier, Benton explained to her. With his sized gang he could not keep a donkey engine working steadily. So they had felled and trimmed to a good start, and now the falling crew and the swampers and buckers were in a ding-dong contest to see how long they could keep ahead of the puffing Seattle yarder.

Stella sat on a stump, watching. Over an area of many acres the ground was a litter of broken limbs, ragged tops, crushed and bent and broken younger growth, twisted awry by the big trees in their fall. Huge stumps upthrust like beacons in a ruffled harbor, grim, massive butts. From all the ravaged wood rose a pungent smell of pitch and sap, a resinous, pleasant smell. Radiating like the spokes of a wheel from the head of the chute ran deep, raw gashes in the earth where the donkey had hauled up the Brobdignagian logs on the end of an inch cable.

"This is no small boy's play, is it, Stell?" Charlie said to her once in passing.

And she agreed that it was not. Agreed more emphatically and with half-awed wonder when she saw the donkey puff and quiver on its anchor cable as the hauling line spooled up on the drum. On the outer end of that line snaked a sixty-foot stick, five foot across the butt, but it came down to the chute head, brushing earth and brush and small trees aside as if they were naught. Once the big log caromed against a stump. The rearward end flipped ten feet in the air and thirty feet sidewise. But it came clear, and came with incredible swiftness to the head of the chute, flinging aside showers of dirt and small stones, leaving one more deep furrow in the forest floor. Benton trotted behind it. Once it came to rest well in the chute, he unhooked the line, freed the choker—the short, noosed loop of cable that slips over the log's end—and the haulback cable hurried the main line back to another log. He followed, and again the donkey shuddered on its foundation skids till another log laid in the chute with its end butted against that which lay before. One after another followed till half a dozen rested there, elongated peas in a wooden pod.

Then a last big stick came with a rush, bunted these others powerfully so that they began to slide with the momentum thus imparted, slowly at first, then gathering way and speed, they shot down to the lake, and plunged to the water over the ten-foot jump-off like a school of breaching whales.

All this took time—vastly more time than it takes in the telling. The logs were ponderous masses. They had to be maneuvered sometimes between stumps and standing timber, jerked this way and that to bring them into the clear. By four o'clock Benton and his rigging slinger had just finished bunting their second batch of logs down the chute. Stella watched these titanic labors with a growing interest and a dawning vision of why these men walked the earth with that reckless swing of their shoulders. For they were palpably masters in their environment. They strove with woodsy giants and laid them low. Amid constant dangers they sweated and strove at a task that shamed the seven labors of Hercules. Gladiators they were in a contest from which they did not always emerge victorious.

When Benton and his helper followed the haulback line away to the domain of the falling gang the last time, Stella had so far unbent as to strike up conversation with the donkey engineer. That greasy individual finished stoking his fire box and replied to her first comment.

"Work? You bet!" said he. "It's

real graft, this is. I got the easy end of it, and mine's no snap. I miss a signal, big stick butts against something solid—biff! goes the line, and maybe cuts a man plumb in two. You got to be wide awake when you run a loggin' donkey. These woods is no place for a man, anyway, if he ain't spry both in his head and feet."

"Do many men get hurt logging?" Stella asked. "It looks awfully dangerous, with these big trees falling and smashing everything. Look at that. Goodness!"

From the donkey they could see a shower of ragged splinters and broken limbs fly when a two-hundred-foot fir smashed a dead cedar that stood in the way of its downward swoop. They could hear the pieces strike against brush and trees like the patter of shot on a tin wall.

The donkey engineer gazed calmly enough.

"Them flyin' chunks raise the dickens sometimes," he observed. "Oh, yes, now an' then a man gets laid out. There's some things you got to take a chance on. Maybe you get cut with an ax, or a limb drops on you, or you get in the way of a breakin' line—though a man ain't got any business in the bight of a line. A man don't stand much show when the end of a inch-'n'-a-quarter cable snaps at him like a whiplash. I seen a feller on Howe Sound cut square in two with a cable end once. A broken block's the worst, though. That generally gets the riggin' slinger, but a piece of it's liable to hit anybody. You see them big iron pulley blocks the haulback cable works in? Well, sometimes they have to anchor a snatch block to a stump an' run the main line through it at an angle to get a log out the way you want. Suppose the block breaks when I'm givin' it to her? Chunks uh that broken cast iron'll fly like bullets. Yes, sir, broken blocks is bad business. Maybe you noticed the boys used the snatch block two or three time this afternoon? We've been lucky in this camp all spring. Nobody so much as nicked himself with an ax. Breaks in the gear don't come very often, anyway, with an outfit in first-class shape. We got good gear, an' a good crew—about as *skookum* a bunch as I ever saw in the woods."

As if to verify the engineer's words, Jim Renfrew, one of the rigging slingers, was injured that afternoon by a broken block. Stella saw two men hurry off to the camp and return with the spring from Benton's bed and a light mattress. They laid the injured logger on this, covered him with a blanket. Then four of them picked it up. As they started, Stella heard one say to her brother:

"Matt's jagged."

"What?" Benton exploded. "Where'd it come from?"

"One uh them Hungry Bay shingle-bolt cutters's in camp," the logger answered. "Maybe he brought a bottle. I didn't stop to see. But Matt's sure got a tank full."

Benton ripped out an angry oath, passed his men, and strode away down the path. Stella fell in behind him, given to a sudden uneasiness at the wrathful set of his features. She barely kept in sight, so rapidly did he move.

Sam Davis had smoke pouring from the *Chickamin's* stack, but the kitchen pipe lifted no blue column, though it was close to five o'clock. Benton made straight for the cookhouse. Stella followed a trifle uncertainly. A glimpse past Charlie as he came out showed her Matt staggering aimlessly about the kitchen, red-eyed, scowling, muttering to himself. Benton hurried to the cookhouse door, much as a hound might follow a scent, peered in, and went on to the corner.

On the side facing the lake he found

the source of the cook's intoxication. A tall and swarthy lumberjack squatted on his haunches, gabbling in the Chinook jargon to a *klootchman* and a wizen-featured old Siwash. The Indian woman was drunk beyond any mistaking, affably drunk. She looked up at Benton out of vacuous eyes, grinned, and generously extended to him a square-faced bottle of gin. The logger rose to his feet.

"H'lo, Benton!" he greeted thickly. "How's everythin'?"

Benton's answer was a quick lurch of his body and a smashing jab of his clenched fist. The blow stretched the logger on his back, with blood streaming from both nostrils. But he was a hardy customer, for he bounced up like a rubber ball, only to be floored even more viciously before he was well set on his feet. This time Benton snarled a curse and kicked him as he lay.

"Charlie, Charlie!" Stella screamed.

If he heard her, he gave no heed.

"Hit the trail, you!" he shouted at the logger. "Hit it quick, before I tramp your face into the ground. I told you once not to come around here feeding booze to my cook. I do all the whisky drinking that's done in this camp, and don't you forget it. I've got troubles enough without whisky."

The man gathered himself up, badly shaken, and, holding his hand to his bleeding nose, made off to his rowboat at the float.

"G'wan home!" Benton curtly ordered the Siwashes. "Get drunk at your own camp, not in mine. Sabe? Beat it!"

They scuttled off, the wizened little old man steadying his fat *klootch* along her uncertain way. Down on the lake the chastised logger stood out in his boat, resting once on his oars to shake a fist at Benton. Then Charlie faced about on his shocked and outraged sister.

"Good heavens!" she burst out. "Is it necessary to be so downright brutal in actions as well as speech?"

"I'm running a logging camp, not a kindergarten," he snapped angrily. "I know what I'm doing. If you don't like it go in the house where your hypersensitive tastes won't be offended."

"Thank you," she responded cuttingly, and swung about, angry and hurt—only to have a fresh scare from the drunken cook reeling forward.

"I'm gonna quit," he loudly declared. "I ain't goin' to stick 'round here no more. The job's no good. I want m' time. Yuh hear me, Benton. I'm through. Com-pletely, ab-sho-lutely through. You bet I am. Gimme m' time. I'm a gone goose."

"Quit, then, hang you!" Benton growled. "You'll get your check in a minute. You're a fine excuse for a cook, all right—get drunk right on the job. You don't need to show up here again, when you've had your jag out."

"'S all right," Matt declared largely. "'S other jobs. You ain't the whole Pacific coast. Oh, way down 'pon the Swa-a-nee ribber——"

He broke into dolorous song and turned back into the cookhouse. Benton's hard-set face relaxed. He laughed shortly.

"Takes all kinds to make a world," he commented. "Don't look so horrified, sis. This isn't the regular order of events. It's just an accumulation—and it sort of got me going. Here's the boys."

The four stretcher men set down their burden in the shade of the bunk house. Renfrew was conscious now.

"Tough luck, Jim," Benton sympathized. "Does it pain much?"

Renfrew shook his head. White and weakened from shock and loss of blood, nevertheless he bravely disclaimed pain.

"We'll get you fixed up at the Springs," Benton went on. "It's a nasty slash in the meat, but I don't

think the bone was touched. You'll be on deck before long. I'll see you through, anyway."

They gave him a drink of water and filled his pipe, joking him about easy days in the hospital while they sweated in the woods. The drunken cook came out, carrying his rolled blankets; began maudlin sympathy, and was promptly squelched, whereupon he retreated to the float, emitting conversation to the world at large. Then they carried Renfrew down to the float, and Davis began to haul up the anchor to lay the *Chickamin* alongside.

Benton heaved a sigh of relief and turned to his sister.

"Still mad, Stell?" he asked placatingly, and put his arm over her shoulders.

"Of course not," she responded instantly to this kindlier phase. "Ugh! Your hands are all bloody, Charlie."

"That's so—but it'll wash off," he replied. "Well, we're shy a good woodsman and a cook, and I'll miss 'em both. But it might be worse. Here's where you go to bat, Stella. Get on your apron and lend me a hand in the kitchen, like a good girl. We have to eat, no matter what happens."

CHAPTER VI.

THE DIGNITY(?) OF TOIL.

By such imperceptible degrees that she was scarce aware of it, Stella took her place as a cog in her brother's logging machine, a unit in the human mechanism which he operated skillfully and relentlessly at top speed to achieve his desired end—one million feet of timber in boom sticks by September the first.

From the evening that she stepped into the breach created by a drunken cook the kitchen burden settled steadily upon her shoulders. For a week Benton daily expected and spoke of the arrival of a new cook.

Quick of perception, as thorough as her brother in whatsoever she set her hand to do, Stella was soon equal to the job. And as the days passed, and no camp cook came to their relief, Benton left the job to her as a matter of course.

"You can handle that kitchen with Katy as well as a man," he said to her at last. "And it will give you something to occupy your time. I'd have to pay a cook seventy dollars a month. Katy draws twenty-five. You can credit yourself with the balance, and I'll pay off when the contract money comes in. We might as well keep the coin in the family. I'll feel easier, because you won't get drunk and jump the job in a pinch. What do you say?"

She said the only possible thing to say under the circumstances. But she did not say it with pleasure, nor with any feeling of gratitude. It was hard work, and she and hard work were utter strangers. Her feet ached from continual standing on them. The heat and the smell of stewing meat and vegetables sickened her. Her hands were growing rough and red from dabbling in water, punching bread dough, handling the varied articles of food that go to make up a meal. Upon hands and forearms there stung continually certain small cuts and burns that lack of experience over a hot range inevitably inflicted upon her. Whereas time had promised to hang heavy on her hands, now an hour of idleness in the day became a precious boon.

For to prepare three times daily food for a dozen hungry men is no mean undertaking. One cannot have in a logging camp the conveniences of a hotel kitchen. The water must be carried in buckets from the creek near by, the wood brought in armfuls from the pile of sawn blocks outside. The low-roofed kitchen shanty was always like an oven. The flies swarmed in their tens of thousands. As the men sweated with ax and saw in the woods, so she

sweated in the kitchen. And her work began two hours before their day's labor, and continued two hours after they were done. She slept like one exhausted, and rose full of sleep heaviness, full of bodily soreness and spiritual protest when the alarm clock raised its din in the cool morning.

"You don't like thees work, do you, Mees Benton?" Katy John said to her one day, in the soft, slurring accent that colored her English. "You wasn't cut out for a cook."

"This isn't work," Stella retorted irritably. "It's simple drudgery. I don't wonder that men cooks take to drink."

Katy laughed.

"Why don't you be nice to Mr. Abbey," she suggested archly. "He'd like to give you a better job than thees—for life. My, but it must be nice to have lots of money like that man's got—and never have to work."

"You'll get those potatoes peeled sooner if you don't talk quite so much, Katy," Miss Benton made reply.

There *was* that way out—as the Siwash girl broadly indicated. Paul Abbey had grown into the habit of coming there rather more often than mere neighborliness called for—and it was palpable that he did not come to hold converse with Benton or Benton's gang, although he was hail fellow with all woodsmen. At first his coming might have been laid to any whim. Latterly Stella herself was unmistakably the attraction. He brought his sister once, a fair-haired girl about Stella's age. She proved an exceedingly self-contained young person, whose speech during the hour of her stay amounted to a dozen or so drawling sentences. With no hint of condescension or superciliousness, she still managed to arouse in Stella a mild degree of resentment. She wore an impeccable pongee silk, simple and costly, and *her* hands had evidently never known the roughening of work. In one way and another, Miss Benton straightway conceived an active dislike for Linda Abbey. So her reception of Paul's sister was not conducive to chumminess. And Paul did not bring Linda again.

But he himself came oftener than Stella desired to be bothered with him. Charlie was beginning to indulge in some rather broad joking, which offended and irritated her. She was not in the least attracted to Paul Abbey. He was a nice enough young man. For all she knew he might be a concentration of all the manly virtues. But he gave no fillip to either her imagination or her emotions.

Sometimes she considered what her life might be if she should marry him. Abbey was wealthy in his own right, and heir to more wealth. But—she could not forbear a wry grimace at the idea. Some fateful hour love would flash across her horizon, a living flame. She could visualize the tragedy if it should be too late, if it found her already bound—sold for a mess of pottage at her ease. She did not mince words to herself when she reflected on this matter. She knew herself as a creature of passionate impulses, consciously resenting all restraint. She knew that men and women did mad things under the spur of emotion. She wanted no shackles; she wanted to be free to face the great adventure when it came.

Yet there were times during the weeks that flitted past when it seemed to her that no bondage could be meaner, more repugnant, than that daily slavery in her brother's kitchen; that transcendent conceptions of love and marriage were vain details by comparison with aching feet and sleep-heavy eyes, with the sting of burns, the smart of sweat on her face, all the never-ending trifles that so irritated her.

If Paul Abbey had chanced to ask her to marry him during a period of such bodily and spiritual rebellion, she would probably have committed herself

to that means of escape in sheer desperation. It steadily sapped both her strength and patience.

But he chose an ill time for his declaration. Stella had overtaken her work and snared a fleeting hour of idleness in mid-afternoon of a hot day in early August. Under a branchy alder at the cookhouse end she piled all the pillows she could commandeer in their quarters, and curled herself upon them at grateful ease. Like a tired animal she gave herself up to the pleasure of physical relaxation, staring at a perfect turquoise sky through the whispering leaves above. She was not even thinking. She was too tired to think, and for the time being too much at peace to permit thought that would, in the very nature of things, be disturbing.

Abbey maintained for his own pleasure a fast motor boat. He slid now into the bay unheard, tied up beside the float, walked to the kitchen, glanced in, then around the corner, and smilingly took a seat on the grass near her.

"It's too perfect a day to loaf in the shade," he observed, after a brief exchange of commonplaces. "Won't you come out for a little spin on the lake? A ride in the *Wolf* will put some color in your cheeks."

"If I had time," she said, "I would. But loggers must eat though the heavens fall. In about twenty minutes I'll have to start supper. I'll have color enough, goodness knows, once I get over that stove."

Abbey plucked nervously at a blade of grass for a minute.

"This is a regular dog's life for you," he broke out suddenly.

"Oh, hardly that," she protested. "It's a little hard on me because I haven't been used to it, that's all."

"It's Chinaman's work," he said hotly. "Charlie oughtn't to let you stew in that kitchen."

She said nothing, was not moved to defense of her brother. She was loyal enough to her blood—but not so intensely loyal that she could defend him against criticism that struck a responsive chord in her own mind. She was beginning to see that, being useful, Charlie was making use of her. His horizon had narrowed to logs that might be transmuted into money. Enslaved himself by his engrossing purposes, he thought nothing of enslaving others to serve his end. She had come to a definite conclusion about that, and she meant to collect her wages when he sold his logs, collect also the ninety dollars of her money he had coolly appropriated, and try a different outlet. If one must work one might at least seek work a little to one's taste. She therefore dismissed Abbey's comment carelessly:

"Some one has to do it."

A faint flush crept slowly up into his round, boyish face. He looked at her with disconcerting steadiness. Perhaps something in his expression gave her the key to his thought, or it may have been that peculiar psychical receptiveness which in a woman we are pleased to call intuition—but at any rate Stella divined what was coming, and would have forestalled it by rising. He prevented that move by catching her hands.

"Look here, Stella," he blurted out, "it just grinds me to death to see you slaving away in this camp, feeding a lot of roughnecks. Won't you marry me, and cut this sort of thing out? We'd be no end good chums."

She gently disengaged her hands, her chief feeling one of amusement—Abbey was in such an agony of blushing diffidence, all flustered at his own temerity. Also, she thought, a trifle precipitate. That was not the sort of wooing to carry her off her feet. For that matter, she was quite sure nothing Paul Abbey could do or say would ever stir her pulses. She had to put an end to the situation, however. She took refuge in a flippant manner.

"Thanks for the compliment,, Mr. Abbey," she smiled. "But, really, I couldn't think of inflicting repentance at leisure on you in that offhand way. You wouldn't want me to marry you just so I could resign the job of chef, would you?"

"Don't you like me?" he asked plaintively.

"Not that way," she answered positively.

"You might try," he suggested hopefully. "Honest, I'm crazy about you. I've liked you ever since I saw you first. I wouldn't want any greater privilege than to marry you and take you away from this sort of thing. You're too good for it. Maybe I'm kind of sudden, but I know my own mind. Can't you take a chance with me?"

"I'm sorry," she said gently, seeing him so sadly in earnest. "It isn't a question of taking a chance. I don't care for you. I haven't got any feeling but the mildest sort of friendliness. If I married you, it would only be for a home, as the saying is, and I'm not made that way. Can't you see how impossible it would be?"

He was standing very near her, and they were both so intent upon the momentous business that occupied them that neither noticed Charlie Benton until his hail startled them to attention.

"Hello, folks!" he greeted, and passed on into the cook shanty, bestowing upon Stella, over Abbey's shoulder, a comprehensive grin which nettled her exceedingly. Her peaceful hour had been disturbed to no purpose. She did not want to love or be loved. For the moment, she felt old beyond her years, mature beyond the comprehension of any man. If she had voiced her real attitude toward Paul Abbey, she would have counseled him to run and play, "like a good little boy."

Instead, she remarked:

"I must get to work." And left her downcast suitor without further ceremony.

As she went about her work in the kitchen, she saw Abbey seat himself upon a log in the yard, his countenance wreathed in gloom. He was presently joined by her brother. Glancing now and then, she made a guess at the meat of their talk. Her lip curled slightly. She saw them walk down to Abbey's launch, and Charlie delivered an encouraging slap on Paul's shoulder as he embarked. Then the speedy craft tore out of the bay at a headlong gait, her motor roaring in unmuffled exhaust, wide wings of white spray arching off her flaring bows.

CHAPTER VII.

SOME NEIGHBORLY ASSISTANCE.

For a week thereafter, Benton developed moods of sourness, periods of scowling thought. He tried to speed up his gang, and, having all spring and summer driven them at top speed, the added straw broke the back of their patience, and Stella heard some sharp interchanges of words. He quelled one incipient mutiny through sheer dominance, but it left him more short of temper, more crabbedly moody than ever. Eventually, his ill nature broke out against Stella over some trifle, and she—being herself an aggrieved party to his transactions—surprised her own sense of the fitness of things by retaliating in kind.

"I'm slaving away in your old camp from daylight till dark at work I despise, and you can't even speak decently to me," she flared up. "You act like a perfect brute lately. What's the matter with you?"

Benton gnawed at a finger nail in silence.

"Hang it, I guess you're right," he admitted at last. "But I can't help having a grouch. I'm going to fall behind on this contract, the best I can do."

"Well," she replied tartly, "I'm not to blame for that. I'm not responsible for your failure. Why take it out on me?"

"I don't, particularly," he answered. "Only—can't you sabe? A man gets on edge when he works and sweats for months, and see it all about to come to nothing."

"So does a woman," she made pointed retort.

Benton chose to ignore the inference.

"If I fall down on this, it'll just about finish me," he continued glumly. "These people are not going to allow me an inch leeway. I'll have to deliver on that contract to the last stipulated splinter before they'll pay over a dollar. If I don't have a million feet for 'em three weeks from to-day, it's all off—and maybe a suit for breach of contract besides. That's the sort they are. If they can wiggle out of taking my logs, they'll be to the good, because they've made other contracts down the coast at fifty cents a thousand less. And the aggravating thing about it is that if I could get by with this deal, I can close a five-million-foot contract with the Abbey-Monohan outfit, for delivery next spring. I must have the money for this before I can undertake the bigger contract."

"Can't you sell your logs if these other people won't take them?" she asked, somewhat alive now to his position—and, incidentally, her own interest therein.

"In time, yes," he said. "But when you go into the open market with logs, you don't always find a buyer right off the reel. I'd have to hire 'em towed from here to Vancouver, and there's some bad water to get over. Time is money to me right now, Stell. If the thing dragged over two or three months, by the time they were sold and all expenses paid, I might not have anything left. I'm in debt for supplies, behind in wages. When it looks like a man's losing everybody jumps him. That's business. I may have my outfit seized and sold up, if I fall down on this delivery and fail to square up accounts right away. Dammit, if you hadn't given Paul Abbey the cold turndown, I might have got a boost over this hill. You were certainly a chump."

"I'm not a mere pawn in your game yet," she flared hotly. "I suppose you'd trade me for logs enough to complete your contract, and consider it a good bargain."

"Oh, piffle," he answered coolly.

He sat a minute or two longer, again preoccupied with his problems.

"Well," he said at last, "I've got to get action somehow. If I could get about thirty men and another donkey for three weeks, I'd make it."

He went outside. Up in the near woods the whine of the saws and the sounds of chopping kept measured beat. It was late in the forenoon, and Stella was hard about her dinner preparations. Contract or no contract, money or no money, men must eat. That fact loomed biggest on her daily schedule, left her no room to think overlong of other things. Her huff over, she felt rather sorry for Charlie—a feeling accentuated by sight of him humped on a log in the sun, too engrossed in his perplexities to be where he normally was at that hour, in the thick of the logging, working harder than any of his men.

A little later she saw him put off from the float in the *Chickamin's* dinghy. When the crew came to dinner, he had not returned. Nor was he back when they went out again at one.

Near mid-afternoon, however, he strode into the kitchen, wearing the air of a conqueror.

"I've got it fixed," he announced.

Stella looked up from a frothy mass of yellow stuff that she was stirring in a pan.

"Got what fixed?" she asked.

"Why, this log business," he said. "Jack Fyfe is going to put in a crew and a donkey, and we're going to everlastingly rip the innards out of these woods. I'll make delivery, after all."

Benton playfully tweaked Katy John's ears, and went whistling up the trail. It was plain sailing for him now, and he was correspondingly elated.

He tried to talk to Stella that evening when she was through, all about big things in the future, big contracts he could get, big money he could see his way to make. It fell mostly on unappreciative ears. She was tired, so tired that his egotistical chatter irritated her beyond measure. What she would have welcomed with heartfelt gratitude was not so much a prospect of future affluence, in which she might or might not share, as a lightening of her present burden. So far as his conversation ran, Benton's sole concern seemed to be more equipment, more men, so that he might get out more logs. In the midst of this optimistic talk, Stella walked abruptly into her room.

Noon of the next day brought the *Panther* coughing into the bay, flanked on the port side by a scow upon which rested a twin to the iron monster that jerked logs into her brother's chute. To starboard was made fast a like scow. That was housed over, a smoking stovepipe stuck through the roof, and a capped and aproned cook rested his arms on the window sill as they floated in. Men to the number of twenty or more clustered about both scows and the *Panther's* deck, busy with pipe and cigarette and rude jest. The clatter of their voices uprose through the noon meal. But when the donkey scow thrust its blunt nose against the beach, the chaff and laughter died into silent, capable action.

"A Seattle yarder, properly handled, can do anything but climb a tree," Charlie had once boasted to her, in reference to his own machine.

It seemed quite possible to Stella—watching Jack Fyfe's crew at work. Steam was up in the donkey. They carried a line from its drum through a snatch block ashore, and jerked half a dozen logs crosswise before the scow in a matter of minutes. Then the same cable was made fast to a sturdy fir, the engineer stood by, and the ponderous machine slid forward on its own skids, like an upended barrel on a sled, down off the scow, up the bank, smashing brush, branches, dead roots, all that stood in its path, drawing steadily up to the anchor tree as the cable spooled up on the drum.

By mid-afternoon, Stella noticed an acceleration of numbers in the logs that came hurtling lakeward. Now at shorter intervals arose the grinding sound of their arrival, the ponderous splash as each leaped to the water. It was a good thing, she surmised—for Charlie Benton. She could not see where it made much difference to her whether ten logs a day or a hundred came down to the boom sticks.

Late that afternoon, Katy vanished upon one of her periodic visits to the camp of her kindred around the point. Bred out of doors, of a tribe whose immemorial custom it is that the women do all the work, the Siwash girl was strong as an ox—and nearly as bovine in temperament and movements. She could lift with ease a weight that taxed Stella's strength, and Stella Benton was no weakling, either. It was, therefore, a part of Katy's routine to keep water pails filled from the creek and the wood box supplied, in addition to washing dishes and carrying food to the table. Katy slighted these various tasks occasionally. She needed oversight, continual admonition, to get any job done in time. She was slow to the point of exasperation. Nevertheless, she lightened the day's

labor, and Stella put up with her slowness, since she needs must, or assume the entire burden herself. This time, Katy thoughtlessly left with both water pails empty.

Stella was just picking them up off the bench, when a shadow darkened the door, and she looked around to see Jack Fyfe.

"How d' do," he greeted.

He had seemed a short man. Now, standing within four feet of her, she perceived that this was an illusion created by the proportion and thickness of his body. He was, in fact, half a head taller than she—and Stella stood five foot five. His blue eyes met hers squarely, with a cool, impersonal quality of gaze. There was neither smirk nor embarrassment in his straightforward glance. He was, in effect, "sizing her up," just as he would have looked casually over a logger asking him for a job. Stella sensed that, and, resenting it, momentarily failed to match his manner. She flushed. Fyfe smiled, a broad, friendly grin, in which a wide mouth opened to show strong, even teeth.

"I'm after a drink," he said quite impersonally, and, coolly taking the pails out of her hands, walked through the kitchen and down to the creek. He was back in a minute, set the filled buckets in their place, and helped himself with a dipper.

"Say," he asked easily, "how do you like life in a logging camp by this time? This is sure one hot job you've got."

"Literally or slangily?" she asked, in a flippant tone. Fyfe's reputation, rather vividly colored, had reached her from various sources. She was not quite sure whether she cared to countenance him or not. There was a disturbing quality about his glance, a subtle suggestion of force about him that she felt without being able to define in understandable terms. In any case, she felt more than equal to the task of squelching any effort at familiarity—even if Jack Fyfe were, in a sense, the convenient god in her brother's machine. Fyfe chuckled at her retort.

"Both," he replied shortly, and went out.

She saw him a little later out on the bay, in the *Panther's* dink, standing up in the little boat, making long, graceful casts with a pliant rod. The result of his efforts was enough trout to make a breakfast for the crew. She ate hers, and mentally thanked Jack Fyfe.

Lying in her bed that night, in the short interval that came between undressing and wearied sleep, she found herself wondering with a good deal more interest about Jack Fyfe than she had even bestowed upon—well, Paul Abbey, for instance.

She was quite positive that she was going to dislike Jack Fyfe, if he were thrown much in her way. There was something about him that she resented. The difference between him and the rest of the rude crew among which she must perforce live was a question of degree, not of kind. There was certainly some compelling magnetism about the man. But along with it went what she considered an almost brutal directness of speech and action. Part of this conclusion came from hearsay, part from observation, limited though her opportunities had been for the latter. Miss Stella Benton, for all her poise, was not above jumping to conclusions. There was something about Jack Fyfe that she resented. She irritably dismissed it as a foolish impression, but the fact remained that the mere physical nearness of him seemed to put her on the defensive, as if he were in reality a hunter and she the hunted.

Fyfe joined Charlie Benton about the time she finished work. The three of them sat on the grass before Benton's quarters, and every time Jack Fyfe's

eyes rested on her, she steeled herself to resist—what, she did not know. Something intangible, something that disturbed her. She had never experienced anything like that before. It tantalized her, roused her curiosity. There was nothing occult about the man. He was nowise fascinating, either in face or manner. He made no bid for her attention. Yet, during the half hour he sat there, Stella's mind revolved constantly about him. She recalled all that she had heard of him, much of it, from her point of view, highly discreditable. Inevitably she fell to comparing him with other men she knew.

She had, in a way, unconsciously been prepared for just such a measure of concentration upon Jack Fyfe. For he was a power on Roaring Lake, and power, physical, intellectual, or financial, exacts its own tribute of consideration. He was a fighter, a dominant, hard-bitten woodsman, so the tale ran. He had gathered about him the toughest crew on the lake, himself the most turbulent of all, upon occasion. He controlled many square miles of big timber, and he had gotten it all by his own effort, in the eight years since he came to Roaring Lake as a hand logger. He was slow to speech, chain lightning in action, respected generally, feared a lot. All these things her brother and Katy John had sketched for Stella with much verbal embellishment.

CHAPTER VII.

DURANCE VILE.

By September 1st, a growing uneasiness hardened into distasteful certainty upon Stella. It had become her firm resolve to get what money was due her when Charlie marketed his logs, and to try another field of labor. That camp on Roaring Lake was becoming a nightmare to her. She had no inherent dislike for work. She was too vibrantly alive to be lazy. But she had had an overdose of unaccustomed drudgery, and she was growing desperate.

But she did not go. Benton left to make his delivery to the mill company, the great boom of logs gliding slowly along in the wake of a tug, the *Chickamin* in attendance. Benton's crew accompanied the boom. Fyfe's gang loaded their donkey aboard the scow and went home. The bay lay all deserted, the woods silent. For the first time in three months, she had all her hours free, only her own wants to attend. Katy John spent most of her time in the smoky camp of her people. Stella loafed. For two days she did nothing, gave herself up to a physical torpor she had never known before.

Presently, however, the old, restless energy revived. The spring came back to her step, she shed like a cast-off garment the lethargy born of reaction. And, in so doing, her spirit rose in hot rebellion against being a prisoner to deadening drudgery, against being shut away from all the teeming life that throve and trafficked beyond the solitude in which she sat immured. When Charlie came back, there was going to be a change. She repeated that to herself with determination.

But Benton failed to come back on the appointed day. The four days lengthened to a week. Then the *Panther,* bound uplake, stopped to leave a brief note from Charlie, telling her business had called him to Vancouver.

Altogether, it was ten days before the *Chickamin* whistled up the bay. She slid in beside the float, her decks bristling with men, like a passenger craft. Stella, so thoroughly sated with loneliness that she temporarily forgot her grievances, flew to meet her brother. But one fair glimpse of the disembarking crew was enough. They were all in varying stages of liquor—from two or three who had to be hauled

over the float and up to the bunk house like sacks of bran, to others who were so happily under the influence of John Barleycorn that every move was some silly antic. She retreated in disgust. When Charlie reached the cabin, he himself proved to be fairly mellow, in the best of spirits—speaking truly in the double sense.

"Hello, lady," he hailed jovially. "How did you fare all by your lonesome this long time? I didn't figure to be gone so long, but there was a lot to attend to. How are you, anyway?"

"All right," she answered coolly. "Goodness, your breath's enough to knock one down. You evidently celebrated your log delivery in the accepted fashion."

"Don't you believe it," he grinned amiably. "I had a few drinks with the boys on the way up, that's all. No, sir, it was straight business, with a capital B, all the time I was gone. I've got a good thing in hand, sis—big money in sight. Tell you about it later. Think you and Katy can rustle grub for this bunch by six?"

"Oh, I suppose so," she said shortly. It was on the tip of her tongue to tell him then and there that she was through—like Matt, the cook, that memorable afternoon—"completely an' ab-sho-lutely through." She refrained. There was no use in being truculent. But that drunken crowd looked formidable in numbers.

"How many extra?" she asked mechanically.

"Thirty men, all told," Benton returned briskly. "I tell you, I'm sure going to rip the heart out of this limit before spring. I've signed up a six-million-foot contract for delivery as soon as the logs'll go over Roaring Rapids in the spring. Remember what I told you when you came—you stick with me, and you'll wear diamonds. I stand to clean up twenty thousand on the winter's work."

"In that case, you should be able to hire a real cook," she suggested, a spice of malice in her tone.

"I sure will, when it begins to come right," he promised largely. "And I'll give you a soft job keeping books, then. Well, I'll lend you a hand for to-night. Where's the Siwash maiden?"

"Over at the camp—there she comes now," Stella replied. "Will you start a fire, Charlie, while I change my dress?"

"You look like a peach in that thing." He stood off a pace to admire. "You're some dame, Stell, when you get on your glad rags."

She frowned at her image in the glass behind the closed door of her room, as she set about unfastening the dainty lawn dress she had worn that afternoon. Deep in her trunk, along with much other unused finery, it had reposed all summer. That ingrained instinct to be admired, to be garbed fittingly and well, came back to her as soon as she was rested. And though there was none but squirrels and blue jays and occasionally Katy John, to cast admiring eyes upon her, it had pleased her for a week to wear her best, and wander about the beaches and among the dusky trunks of giant fir, a picture of blooming womanhood beautifully gowned. She took off the dress and threw it on the bed with a resentful rush of feeling. The treadmill gaped for her again. But not for long. She was through with that. She was glad that Charlie's prospects pleased him. He could not call on her to help him out of a hole now. She would tell him her decision to-night. And as soon as he could get a cook to fill her place, then good-by Roaring Lake, good-by to kitchen smells and flies and sixteen hours a day over a hot stove.

Curiously enough, while she changed

her clothes, her thoughts a jumble of present things she disliked and the unknown that she would have to face alone in Vancouver, she found her mind turning on Jack Fyfe. During his three weeks'. stay, they had progressed less in the direction of acquaintance than she and Paul Abbey had gone in two meetings. Fyfe talked to her now and then briefly, but he looked at her more than he talked. Where his searching gaze disturbed, his speech soothed, it was so coolly impersonal. That, she deemed, was merely another of his odd contradictions. He was contradictory. Stella had a propensity for character analysis, and she classified Jack Fyfe as a creature of unrestrained passions.

Yet, in spite of the bold look in his eyes that always confused and irritated her, Fyfe had never singled her out for the slightest attention of the kind any man bestows upon an attractive woman. Stella was no fool. She knew that she was attractive, and she knew why. She had been prepared to repulse, and there had been nothing to repulse.

Later in the evening, when supper was over, the work done, and the loggers' celebration was slowly subsiding in the bunk house, she told Charlie, with blunt directness, what she wanted to do. With equally blunt directness, he declared that he would not permit it. Stella's teeth came together with an angry little click.

"I'm of age, Charlie," she said to him. "It isn't for you to say what you will or will not *permit* me to do. I want that money of mine that you used —and what I've earned. God knows I *have* earned it. I can't stand this work, and I don't intend to. It isn't work; it's slavery."

"You could be a whole lot worse off, if you only knew it," Benton returned grumpily. "If you haven't got any sense about things, I have. I know what a rotten hole Vancouver, or any other seaport town, is for a girl alone. I won't let you make any foolish break like that. That's flat."

From this position she failed to budge him. Once angered, partly by her expressed intention and partly by the outspoken protest against the mountain of work imposed on her, Charlie refused point-blank to give her either the ninety dollars he had taken out of her purse, or the three months' wages due. Having made her request, and having met with this—to her—amazing refusal, Stella sat dumb. There was too fine a streak in her to break out in recrimination. She was too proud to cry.

So that night she went to bed in a ferment of helpless rage. Virtually she was a prisoner, as much so as if Charlie had kidnaped her and held her so by brute force. The economic restraint was all potent. Without money, she could not even leave the camp. And when she contemplated the daily treadmill before her, she shuddered.

CHAPTER IX.

JACK FYFE'S CAMP.

She was still hot with the spirit of mutiny when morning came. But she cooked breakfast. It was not in her to act like a petulant child. Morning also brought a different aspect to things, for Charlie told her while he helped prepare breakfast that he was going to take his crew and repay in labor the help Jack Fyfe had given him.

"While we're there, Jack's cook will feed all hands," said he. "And by the time we're through there, I'll have things fixed here so it won't be such hard going for you here. Do you want to go along to Jack's camp?"

"No," she answered shortly. "I don't. I would much prefer to get away from this lake altogether, as I told you last night."

"You might as well forget that no-

tion," he said stubbornly. "I've got a little family pride in the matter. I don't want my sister drudging at the only kind of work she'd be able to earn a living at."

"You're perfectly willing to have me drudge here," she flashed back.

If there had been opportunity to enlarge on that theme, they might have come to a verbal clash. But Benton never lost sight of his primary object. The getting of breakfast and putting his men about their work promptly was of more importance to him than Stella's grievance. So the incipient storm dwindled to a sullen mood on her part. Breakfast over, Benton loaded men and tools aboard a scow hitched beside the boat. He repeated his invitation, and Stella refused, with a sarcastic reflection on the company she would be compelled to keep there.

The *Chickamin,* with her tow, drew off, and she was alone again.

"Marooned once more," Stella said to herself, when the little steamboat slipped behind the first jutting point. "Oh, if I could just be a man for a while."

Nevertheless, Stella resigned herself to make the best of it, and it proved a poor best. She could not detach herself sufficiently from the sordid realities to lose herself in daydreaming. There was not a book in the camp save some ten-cent sensations she found in the bunk house, and these she had exhausted during Charlie's first absence. The uncommon stillness of the camp oppressed her more than ever. Even the blue jays and squirrels seemed to sense its abandonment, seemed to take her as part of the inanimate fixtures, for they frisked and chattered about with uncommon fearlessness. The lake lay dead gray, glassy as some great, irregular window in the crust of the earth. Only at rare intervals did sail or smoke dot its surface, and then far offshore. The woods stood breathless in the autumn sun. It was like being entombed. And there would be a long stretch of it—with only a recurrence of that deadly grind of kitchen work when the loggers came home again.

Some time during the next forenoon, she went southerly along the lake shore on foot, without object or destination, merely to satisfy in some measure the restless craving for action. She craved, without being wholly aware of it, or altogether admitting it to herself, some human distraction in all that majestic solitude.

It was forthcoming. When she returned to camp at two o'clock, driven in by hunger, Jack Fyfe sat on the doorstep.

"How de do. I've come to bring you over to my place," he announced quite casually.

"Thanks. But I've already declined one pressing invitation to that effect," Stella returned dryly. His matter-of-fact assurance rather nettled her.

"A woman always has the privilege of changing her mind," Fyfe smiled. "Charlie is going to be at my camp for at least three weeks. It'll rain soon, and the days'll be pretty gray and dreary and lonesome. You might as well pack your war bag and come along."

She stood uncertainly. Her tongue held ready a blunt refusal. But she did not utter it. And she did not know why. She did have a glimpse of the futility of refusing, only she did not admit that refusal might be of no weight in the matter. With her mind running indignantly against compulsion, nevertheless her muscles involuntarily moved to obey. It irritated her further that she should feel in the least constrained to obey the calmly expressed wish of this quiet-spoken woodsman. Certain possible phases of a lengthy sojourn in Jack Fyfe's camp shot across her mind. He seemed of uncanny per-

ception, for he answered this thought before it was clearly formed.

"Oh, you'll be properly chaperoned, and you won't have to mix with the crew," he drawled. "I've got all kinds of room. My boss logger's wife is up from town for a while. She's a fine, motherly old party, and she keeps us all in order."

"I haven't had any lunch," she temporized. "Have you?"

He shook his head.

"I rowed over here before twelve. Thought I'd get you back to camp in time for dinner. You know," he said, with a twinkle in his blue eyes, "a logger never eats anything but a meal. A lunch to us is a snack that you put in your pocket. I guess we lack tone out here. We haven't got past the breakfast-dinner-supper stage yet. Too busy making the country fit to live in."

"You have a tremendous job in hand," she observed.

"Oh, maybe," he laughed. "All in the way you look at it. Suits some of us. Well, if we get to my camp before three, the cook might feed us. Come on. You'll get to hating yourself if you stay here alone till Charlie's through."

Why not? Thus she parleyed with herself, one-half of her minded to stand upon her dignity, the other part of her urging acquiescence in his wish that was almost a command. She was tempted to refuse just to see what he would do. But she reconsidered that. Without any logical foundation for the feeling, she was shy of pitting her will against Jack Fyfe's. Hitherto, quite sure of herself, schooled in self-possession, it was a new and disturbing experience to come in contact with that subtle, analysis-defying quality which carries the possessor thereof straight to his or her goal over all opposition; which, indeed, many times stifles all opposition. Force of character, overmastering personality, emanation of sheer will, she could not say in what terms it should be described. Whatever it was, Jack Fyfe had it. It existed, a factor to be reckoned with when one dealt with him. For within twenty minutes she had packed a suit case full of clothes, and was embarked in his rowboat.

He sent the light-built craft easily through the water with regular, effortless strokes. Stella sat in the stern, facing him. Out past the north horn of the bay she broke the silence that had fallen between them.

"Why did you make a point of coming for me?" she asked bluntly.

Fyfe rested on his oars a moment, looking at her in his direct, unembarrassed way.

"I wintered once on the Stickine," he said. "My partner pulled out before Christmas, and never came back. It was the first time I'd ever been alone in my life. I wasn't a much older hand in the country than you are. Four months without hearing the sound of a human voice. Stark alone. I got so I talked to myself out loud before spring. So I thought—well, I thought I'd come and bring you over to see Mrs. Howe."

Stella sat gazing at the slow flitting past of the lake shore, her chin in her hand.

"Thank you," she said at last, and very gently.

Fyfe looked at her a minute or more, a queer, half-amused expression creeping into his eyes.

"Well," he said finally, "I might as well tell the whole truth. I've been thinking about you quite a lot lately, Miss Stella Benton—or I wouldn't have thought about you getting lonesome."

He smiled ever so faintly, a mere movement of the corners of his mouth, at the pink flush which rose quickly in her cheeks at that, and then resumed his steady pull at the oars.

Except for a greater number of board shacks, and a larger area of

stump and top-littered waste immediately behind it, Fyfe's headquarters differed little from her brother's camp. Outwardly, at least. Jack led her to a long log structure, with a shingle roof, which, from its more substantial appearance, she judged to be his personal domicile. A plump, smiling woman of forty greeted her on the threshold of this. Once within, Stella perceived that there was, in fact, considerable difference in Mr. Fyfe's habitation. There was a great stone fireplace, before which big easy-chairs invited restful lounging. The floor was overlaid with thick rugs which deadened her footfalls. With no pretense of ornamental decoration, the room held an air of homely comfort.

"Come in here and lay off your things," Mrs. Howe beamed on her. "If I'd 'a' known you were livin' so close, we'd have been acquainted a week ago, though I ain't got rightly settled here myself. My land! These men are such clams! I never knowed till this mornin' there was any white woman at this end of the lake besides myself."

She showed Stella into a bedroom. It boasted an enamel washstand, with taps which yielded hot and cold water, neatly curtained windows, and a deep-seated morris chair. Certainly, Fyfe's household accommodation was far superior to Charlie Benton's. Stella expected the man's home to be rough and ready like himself, and, in a measure, it was, but a comfortable sort of rough and readiness. She took off her hat and had a critical survey of herself in a mirror, after which she had just time to brush her hair before answering Mrs. Howe's call to a "cup of tea."

The cup of tea resolved itself into a well-cooked and well-served meal, with china and linen and other unexpected table accessories which agreeably surprised her.

Fyfe maintained his habitual sparsity of words while they ate the food Mrs. Howe brought on a tray hot from the cook's outlying domain. When they finished, he rose, took up his hat, helped himself to a handful of cigars from a box on the fireplace mantel.

"I guess you'll be able to put in the time, all right," he remarked. "Make yourself at home. If you take a notion to read, there's a lot of books and magazines in my room. Mrs. Howe'll show you."

He walked out. Stella was conscious of a distinct relief when he was gone. She had, somehow, experienced a recurrence of that peculiar feeling of needing to be on her guard, as if there were some curious, latent antagonism between them.

But she did not spend much time puzzling over Jack Fyfe. Once out of her sight, she forgot him. It was balm to her lonely soul to have some one of her own sex for company. What Mrs. Howe lacked in the higher culture she made up in homely perception and unassuming kindliness. Her husband was Fyfe's foreman. She herself was not a permanent fixture in the camp. They had a cottage at Roaring Springs, where she spent most of the time so that their three children could be in school.

"I was up here all through vacation," she told Stella. "But Lefty he got to howlin' about bein' left alone shortly after school started again, so I got my sister to look after the kids for a spell while I stay here. I'll be goin' down about the time Mr. Benton's through here."

Stella eventually went out to take a look around. A hard-beaten path led off toward where rose the distant sounds of logging work, the ponderous crash of trees, and the puff of the donkeys. She followed that a little way, and presently came to a knoll some three hundred yards above the beach. There she paused, to look and wonder.

For the crest of this little hillock had been cleared and graded level and planted to grass over an area of four hundred feet square. It was trimmed like a lawn, too. In the center of this vivid green block there stood an unfinished house foundation of gray stone. No stick of timber, no board or any material for further building, lay in sight. The thing stood as if that were to be all; and it was not a new undertaking, temporarily delayed. There was moss creeping over the thick stone wall, she discovered, when she walked over there. Whoever had laid that foundation had done it many a moon before. Yet the sward about was kept as if a gardener had it in charge.

A noble stretch of lake and mountain spread away from there. Straight across the lake, two deep clefts in the eastern range opened on the water, five miles apart. She could see the white ribbon of flaming cascades in each. Between lifted a great mountain, and on the lakeward slope of this stood a terrible scar of a slide, yellow and brown, rising two thousand feet from the shore. A vaporous wisp of cloud hung along the top of the slide, and above this aërial banner there thrust high into the infinite blue a snow-capped pinnacle.

"What an outlook!" she said, barely conscious that she spoke aloud. "Why do these people build their houses in the bush, when they could live in the open and have something like this to look at? They would, if they had any sense of beauty."

"Sure they haven't? Some of them might have, you know, without being able to gratify it."

She started, to find Jack Fyfe almost at her elbow, the gleam of a quizzical smile lighting his face.

"I dare say that might be true," she admitted.

Fyfe's gaze turned from her to the huge sweep of lake and mountain chain. She saw that he was outfitted for fishing, creel on his shoulder, unjointed rod in one hand. By means of his rubber-soled waders he had come upon her noiselessly.

"It's truer than you think, maybe," he said at length. "You don't want to come along and take a lesson in catching rainbows, I suppose?"

"Not this time, thanks." She shook her head.

"I want to get enough for supper, so I'd better be at it," he remarked. "Sometimes they come pretty slow. If you should want to go up and watch the boys work, that trail will take you there."

He went off across the grassy level and plunged into the deep timber that rose like a wall beyond.

Stella went back to the house, to converse upon domestic matters with Mrs. Howe until the shrilling of the donkey whistle brought forty-odd lumberjacks swinging down the trail.

Behind them a little way came Jack Fyfe, with sagging creel. He did not stop to exhibit his catch, but, a half hour later, they were served, hot and crisp, at the table in the big living room, where Fyfe, Stella and Charlie Benton, Lefty Howe and his wife sat down together.

A flunky from the camp kitchen served the meal and cleared it away. For an hour or two after that, the three men sat about in shirt-sleeved ease, puffing at Jack Fyfe's cigars. Then Benton excused himself and went to bed. When Howe and his wife retired, Stella did likewise. The long twilight had dwindled to a misty patch of light sky in the northwest, and she fell asleep, more at ease than she had been for weeks. Sitting in Jack Fyfe's living room through that evening, she had begun to formulate a philosophy to fit her enforced environment—to live for the day only, and avoid thought of the future until there loomed on the

horizon some prospect of a future worth thinking about. The present looked passable enough, she thought, if she kept her mind strictly on the present.

And with that idea to guide her, she found the days slide by smoothly enough. She got on famously with Mrs. Howe, finding that lady full of virtues unsuspected in her type. Charlie was in his element. His prospects looked rosy—led him into egotistic outlines of what he intended to accomplish. To him, the future meant logs in the water, big holdings of timber, a growing bank account. Beyond that, what all his concentrated effort should lead to, save more logs and more timber, he did not seem to go. Judged by his talk, that was the ultimate—economic power, money, and more money. More and more, as Stella listened to him, she became aware that he was following in his father's footsteps. Save that he aimed at greater heights, and that he worked by different methods—juggling with natural resources where their father had merely juggled with prices and tokens of product—their end was the same. Not to create or build up, but to grasp, to acquire. That was the game. To get and to hold for their own use and benefit, and to look upon men and things, in so far as they were of use, as pawns in the game.

She wondered, sometimes, if that was a characteristic of all men; if that were the big motif in the lives of such men as Paul Abbey and Jack Fyfe, for instance; if everything else, save the struggle of getting and keeping of money, resolved itself into purely incidental phases of their existence. For herself, she considered that wealth, or the getting of wealth, was only a means to an end. Just what that end might be, she found a little vague, rather hard to define in exact terms.

Often, when Charlie was holding forth in his accustomed vein, she wondered what Jack Fyfe thought about it, what he masked behind his brief sentences or slow smile. Latterly, her feeling about him, that involuntary bracing and stiffening of herself against his personality, left her. Fyfe seemed to be more or less self-conscious of her presence as a guest in his house. His manner toward her remained always casual, as if she were a man and there was no question of sex attraction or masculine reaction to it between them. She liked him better for that; and she did admire his wonderful strength, the tremendous power invested in his magnificent body, just as she would have admired a tiger without caring to fondle the beast.

Altogether, she spent a tolerably pleasant three weeks. Autumn's gorgeous paint brush laid wonderful coloring upon the maple and alder and birch that lined the lake shore. The days shortened. Sometimes a fine rain would drizzle for hours on end, and, when it would clear, the saw-toothed ranges flanking the lake broke out all freshly robed in white, a mantle that crept lower on the fir-clad slopes after each storm. The winds that whistled off those heights nipped sharply.

Early in October, Charlie Benton had squared his neighborly account with Jack Fyfe. With crew and equipment, he moved home, to begin work anew on his own limit.

Katy John and her people came back from the salmon fishing. Jim Renfrew, still walking with a pronounced limp, returned from the hospital. Charlie wheedled Stella into taking up the cookhouse burden again. Stella consented. In truth, she could do nothing else. Charlie spent a little of his contract profits in piping water to the kitchen, in a few things to brighten up and make more comfortable their own quarters.

"Just as soon as I can put another boom over the rapids, Stell," he prom-

ised, "I'll put a cook on the job. I've got to sail a little close for a while. With this crew, I ought to put a million feet in the water in six weeks. Then I'll be over the hump, and you can take it easy. But till then——"

"Till then, I may as well make myself useful," Stella interrupted caustically.

"Well, why not?" Benton demanded impatiently. "Nobody around here works any harder than I do."

And there the matter rested.

CHAPTER XI.

GRAY DAYS.

That was a winter of big snow. November opened with rain. Day after day, the sun hid his face behind massed, spitting clouds. Rain or shine, the work drove on. From the peep of day till dusk shrouded the woods, Benton's donkey puffed and groaned, axes thudded, there rose the thin, twanging whine of the saws. Log after log slid down the chute, to float behind the boom sticks; and at night the loggers trooped home, soaked to the skin, to hang their steaming Mackinaws around the bunk-house stove. When they gathered in the mess room, they filled it with the odor of sweaty bodies and profane grumbling about the weather.

Early in December, Benton sent out a big boom of logs with a hired stern-wheeler. That was no more than out of Roaring Lake than the snow came. The sleety blasts of a cold afternoon turned, by dark, to great, moist flakes, eddying thick out of a windless night. At daybreak, it lay a foot deep, and snowing hard. Thenceforth, there was no surcease. The white, feathery stuff piled up and piled up, hour upon hour, and day after day, as if the deluge had come again. It stood at the cabin eaves before the break came. Six foot on the level. With the end of the storm came a bright, cold sky, and frost. Not the bitter frost of the high latitudes, but a nipping cold that held off the melting rains and laid a thin scum of ice on every patch of still water.

Necessarily, all work ceased. The donkey was a shapeless mound of white, all the lines and gear buried deep. A man could neither walk on that yielding mass nor wallow through it. The logging crew hailed the enforced rest with open relief. Benton grumbled. And then, with the hours beginning to hang heavy on his hands, he began to spend more and more of his time in the bunk house with the "boys." Particularly in the long evenings.

Stella wondered what pleasure he found in their company, but she never asked him, nor did she devote very much thought to the matter. There was but small cessation in her labors, and that only because six or eight of the men drew their pay and went out. Benton managed to hold the others against the thaw that might open up the woods in twenty-four hours. But the smaller size of the gang only helped a little, and did not help her mentally at all. All the old resentment against the indignity of her position rose, and smoldered continually. To her, the days were full enough of things that she was terribly weary of doing over and over, endlessly. She was always tired.

Before the snow put a stop to logging, Jack Fyfe dropped in once a week or so. When work shut down, he came oftener. He never singled Stella out for any particular attention. Once he surprised her sitting with her elbows on the kitchen table, her face buried in her palms. She looked up at his quiet entrance, and her face must have given him his cue. He leaned a little toward her.

"How long do you think you can stand it?" he asked gently, yet with a peculiar tensity of voice.

"God knows," she answered, surprised into speaking the thought that

lay uppermost in her mind; surprised beyond measure that he should read that thought.

He stood looking down at her for a second or two. His lips parted, but he closed them again over whatever rose to his tongue, and passed silently through the dining room and into the bunk house, where Benton had preceded him a matter of ten minutes.

It lacked a week of Christmas. That day three of Benton's men had gone in the *Chickamin* to Roaring Springs for supplies. They had returned in mid-afternoon, and Stella guessed by the new note of hilarity in the bunk house that part of the supplies had been liquid. This had happened more than once since the big snow closed in. She remembered Charlie's fury at the logger who started Matt the cook on his spree, and she wondered at this relaxation; but it was not in her province, and she made no comment.

Jack Fyfe stayed to supper that evening. Neither he nor Charlie came back to Benton's quarters when the meal was finished; and, while she stacked up the dishes, Katy John observed:

"Goodness sakes, Miss Benton, them fellers was fresh at supper! They was half drunk, some of them. I bet they'll be half a dozen fights before mornin'."

Stella passed over that in silence, with a mental turning up of her nose. It was something she could neither defend nor excuse. It was a disgusting state of affairs, but nothing she could help. She kept harking back to it when she was in her own quarters, and Katy John had vanished for the night into her little room off the kitchen. Tired as she was, she remained wakeful, uneasy. Over in the bunk house, disturbing sounds welled, now and then, into the cold, still night—incoherent snatches of song, voices uproariously raised, bursts of laughter. Once, as she looked out the door, thinking she heard footsteps crunching in the snow, some one rapped out a coarse oath that drove her back with burning face.

As the evening wore late, she began to grow uneasily curious to know in what manner Charlie and Jack Fyfe were lending countenance to this minor riot, if they were even participating in it. Eleven o'clock passed, and still there rose in the bunk house that unabated hum of voices.

Suddenly there rose a brief clamor. In the dead silence that followed she heard a thud and the clinking smash of breaking glass, a panted oath, sounds of struggle.

Stella slipped on a pair of her brother's gum boots and an overcoat and ran out on the path beaten from their cabin to the shore. It led past the bunk house, and on that side opened two uncurtained windows, yellow squares that struck gleaming on the snow. The panes of one were broken now, sharp fragments standing like saw teeth in the wooden sash.

She stole warily near and looked in. Two men were being held apart, one by three of his fellows, the other by Jack Fyfe alone. Fyfe grinned mildly, talking to the men in a quiet, pacific tone.

"Now, you know that was nothing to scrap about," she heard him say. "You're both full of fighting whisky, but a bunk house isn't any place to fight. Wait till morning. If you've still got it in your systems, go outside and have it out. But you shouldn't disturb our game and break up the furniture. Be gentlemen, drunk or sober. Better shake hands and call it square."

"Aw, let 'em go to it, if they want to!"

Charlie's voice, drink-thickened, harsh, came from a corner of the room into which she could not see until she moved nearer. By the time she picked him out, Fyfe resumed his seat at the table where three others and Benton waited, with cards in their hands, red

and white chips and money stacked before them.

She knew enough of cards to realize that a stiff poker game was on the board when she had watched one hand dealt and played. And it angered her. Not from any ethical motive, but because of her brother's part in it. He had no funds to pay a cook's wages, yet he could afford to lose on one hand as much as he credited her with for a month's work. She could slave at the kitchen job day in and day out to save him forty-five dollars a month. He could lose that without the flicker of an eyelash, but he couldn't pay her wages on demand. Also she saw that he had dallied with John Barleycorn overintimately, if the redness of his face and the glassy fixedness of his eyes could be read aright.

"Pig!" she muttered. "If that's his idea of pleasure—oh, well, why should I care? I don't, so far as he's concerned, if I could just get away from this beast of a place myself."

Abreast of her, a logger came to the broken window with a sack to bar out the frosty air, and Stella, realizing suddenly that she was shivering with the cold, ran back to the cabin and got into her bed.

But not to sleep, save in uneasy periods of dozing, until midnight was long past. Then Fyfe and her brother came in. By the sounds, she gathered that Fyfe was putting Charlie to bed. She heard his deep, drawly voice urging the unwisdom of sleeping with calked boots on, and Benton's hiccupy response. The rest of the night she slept fitfully, morbidly imagining terrible things. She was afraid. That was the sum and substance of it. Over in the bunk house, the carousal was still at its height. She could not rid herself of the sight of those two men struggling to be at each other like wild beasts, the bloody face of the one who had been struck, the coarse animalism of the whisky-saturated gang. It repelled and disgusted and frightened her.

CHAPTER XII.

ONE WAY OUT.

The night frosts had crept through the shingle-board walls of Stella's room and made its temperature akin to outdoors when the alarm wakened her at six in the morning. She shivered as she dressed. Katy John was blissfully devoid of any responsibility. Seldom that dusky maiden rose first to light the kitchen fire. Yet Stella resented less each day's bleak beginning than she did the enforced necessity of the situation —the fact that she was there enduring these things practically under compulsion was what galled.

A cutting wind struck her icily as she crossed the few steps of open between cabin and kitchen. Above, no cloud floated, no harbinger of melting rain. The cold stars twinkled over snow-blurred forest, struck tiny gleams from stumps that were now white-capped pillars.

A light burned in the kitchen. She thanked her stars that this bitter-cold morning she would not have to build a fire with freezing fingers while her teeth chattered, and she hurried in to the warmth heralded by a spark-belching stovepipe. But the Siwash girl had not risen to the occasion. Instead, Jack Fyfe sat with his feet on the oven door, a cigar in one corner of his mouth. The kettle steamed. Her porridge pot bubbled ready for the meal.

"Good morning!" he greeted. "Mind my preëmpting your job?"

"Not at all," she answered. "You can have it for keeps, if you want."

"No, thanks." He smiled. "I'm sour on my own cooking. Had to eat too much of it in times gone by. I wouldn't be stoking up here, either, only I got frozen out. Charlie's spare bed hasn't enough blankets for me these cold nights."

He drew his chair aside to be out of the way as she hurried about her breakfast preparations. All the time she was conscious that his eyes were on her, and also that in them lurked an expression of keen interest. His freckled mask of a face gave no clew to his thoughts. It never did, so far as she had ever observed. Fyfe had a gambler's immobility of countenance. He chucked the butt of his cigar in the stove and sat with hands clasped over one knee for some time after Katy John appeared and began setting the dining-room table, with a great clatter of dishes.

He got to his feet then. Stella stood beside the stove, frying bacon. A logger opened the door and walked in. He had been the one to fare ill in the night's hilarity, for a discolored patch encircled one eye and his lips were split and badly swollen. He carried a tin basin.

"Kin I get some hot water?" he asked.

Stella silently indicated the reservoir at one end of the range. The man ladled his basin full. The fumes of whisky, the unpleasant odor of his breath, offended her. She drew back. Fyfe looked at her as the man went out.

"What?" he asked.

She had muttered something—an impatient exclamation of disgust. The man's appearance disagreeably reminded her of the scene she had observed through the bunk-house window. It stung her to think that her brother was fast putting himself on a par with them—without their valid excuse of type and training.

"Oh, nothing," she said wearily, and turned to the sputtering bacon.

Fyfe put his foot up on the stove front and drummed a tattoo on his Mackinaw-clad knee.

"Aren't you getting pretty sick of this sort of work, these more or less uncomfortable surroundings, and the sort of people you have to come in contact with?" he asked pointedly.

"I am," she returned as bluntly, "but I think that's rather an impertinent question, Mr. Fyfe."

He passed imperturbably over this reproof, and his glance turned briefly toward the dining room. Katy John was still noisily at work.

"You hate it," he said positively. "I know you do. I've seen your feelings many a time. I don't blame you. It's a rotten business for a girl with your tastes and bringing up, and I'm afraid you'll find it worse if this snow stays long. I know what a logging camp is when work stops and whisky creeps in, and the boss lets go his hold for the time being."

"That may be true," she returned gloomily, "but I don't see why you should enumerate these disagreeable things for my benefit."

"I'm going to show you a way out," he said softly. "I've been thinking it over for quite a while. I want you to marry me."

Stella gasped.

"Mr. Fyfe!"

"Listen!" he said peremptorily, leaning closer to her and lowering his voice. "I have an idea that you're going to say you don't love me. Lord, *I* know that! But you *hate* this! It grates against every inclination of yours like a file on steel. I wouldn't jar on you like that. I wouldn't permit you to live in surroundings that would. That's the material side of it. Nobody can live on daydreams. I like you, Stella Benton, a whole lot more than I'd care to say right out loud. You and I together could make a home we'd be proud of. I want you, and you want to get away from this. It's natural. Marry me, and play the game fair, and I don't think you'll be sorry. I'm putting it as baldly as I can. You stand to win everything, with nothing to lose—but your domestic chains." The

gleam of a smile lit up his features for a second. "Won't you take a chance?"

"No!" she declared impulsively. "I won't be a party to any such cold-blooded transaction!"

"You don't seem to understand me," he said soberly. "I don't want to hand out any sentimental gush, but it makes me sore to see you wasting yourself on this sort of thing. If you must do it, why don't you do it for somebody who'll make it worth while? If you'd use the brains God gave you, you know that lots of couples have married on flimsier grounds than we'd have. How can a man and a woman really know anything about each other till they've lived together? Just because we don't marry with our heads in the fog is no reason we shouldn't get on fine. What *are* you going to do? Stick here at this till you go crazy? You won't get away. You don't realize what a one-idead, determined person this brother of yours is. He has just one object in life, and he'll use everything and everybody in sight to attain that object. He means to succeed, and he will. You're purely incidental; but he has that perverted, middle-class family pride that will make him prevent you from getting out and trying your own wings. Nature never intended a woman like you to be a celibate—any more than I was so intended—and sooner or later you'll marry somebody—if only to hop out of the fire into the frying pan."

"I hate you," she flashed passionately, "when you talk like that!"

"No, you don't," he returned quietly. "You hate what I say—because it's the truth—and it's humiliating to be helpless. You think I don't sabe? But I'm putting a weapon into your hand. Let's put it differently—leave out the sentiment for a minute. We'll say that I want a housekeeper, preferably an ornamental one—because I like beautiful things. You want to get away from this drudgery. That's what it is—simple drudgery. You crave lots of things you can't get by yourself, but that you could help me get for you. There's things lacking in your life, and so is there in mine. Why shouldn't we go partners? You think about it."

"I don't need to," she answered coolly. "It wouldn't work. You don't appear to have any idea what it means for a woman to give herself up, body and soul, to a man she doesn't care for. For me it would be plain selling myself. I haven't the least affection for you personally. I might even detest you."

"You wouldn't," he said positively.

"What makes you so sure of that?" she demanded.

"It would sound conceited if I told you why," he drawled. "Listen, lady girl! We're not gods and goddesses, us human beings. We're not, after all, in our real impulses, so much different from the age when a man took his club and went after a female that looked good to him. They mated, and raised their young, and very likely faced, on an average, fewer problems than arise in modern marriages supposedly ordained in heaven. You'd have the one big problem solved—the lack of means to live decently—which wrecks more homes than anything else; far more than lack of love. Affection doesn't seem to thrive on poverty. What is love, anyhow?"

His voice took on a challenging note.

Stella shook her head. He puzzled her—wholly serious one minute, a whimsical smile twisting up the corners of his mouth the next; and he surprised her, too, by his sureness of utterance on subjects she had not supposed would enter such a man's mind.

"I don't know," she answered absently, turning over strips of bacon with the long-handled fork.

"There you are!" he said. "I don't know, either. We'd start even, then, for the sake of argument. No, I guess

we wouldn't either, because you're the only woman I've run across, so far, with whom I could calmly contemplate spending the rest of my life in close contact. That's a fact. To me, it's a highly important fact. You don't happen to have any such feeling about me, eh?"

"No. I hadn't even thought of you in that way," Stella answered truthfully.

"You want to think about me," he said calmly. "You want to think about me from every possible angle, because I'm going to come back and ask you this same question every once in a while —so long as you're in reach and doing this dirty work for a thankless boss. You want to think of me as a possible refuge from a lot of disagreeable things. I'd like to have you to chum with, and I'd like to have some incentive to put a big white bungalow on that old foundation for us two." He smiled. "I'll never do it for myself alone. Go on. Take a gambling chance, and marry me, Stella. Say yes, and say it now."

But she shook her head resolutely; and Katy John coming in just then, Fyfe took his foot off the stove and went out of the kitchen. He threw a glance over his shoulder at Stella, a broad smile, as if to say that he harbored no grudge nor nursed a wound in his vanity because she would have none of him.

Katy rang the breakfast gong. Five minutes later, the tattoo of knives and forks and spoons told of appetites in process of appeasement. Charlie came into the kitchen in the midst of this, bearing certain unmistakable signs. His eyes were inflamed, his cheeks still bearing the flush of liquor. His demeanor was that of a man suffering an intolerable headache, and correspondingly short-tempered. Stella barely spoke to him. It was bad enough for a man to make a beast of himself with whisky, but the sore point with her was his gambling streak. There were so many little ways in which she could have eased things with a few dollars. Yet he always grumbled when she spoke of money, always put her off with promises to be redeemed when business got better.

Stella watched him bathe his head copiously in cold water and then seat himself at the long table, trying to force food upon an aggrieved and rebellious stomach. Gradually a flood of recklessness welled up in her breast.

"For two pins, I would marry Jack Fyfe!" she told herself savagely. "*Anything* would be better than this!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PLUNGE.

Jack Fyfe did not happen in again for nearly two weeks, then only to pay a brief call. But he stole an opportunity, when Katy John was not looking, to whisper in Stella's ear:

"Been thinking about that bungalow of ours?"

She shook her head, and he went out quietly, without another word. He neither pleaded nor urged, and perhaps that was wisest, for, in spite of herself, Stella thought continually of him. He loomed always before her, a persistent, compelling factor.

She knew at last, beyond any gainsaying, that the venture tempted, largely, perhaps, because it contained so great an element of the unknown. To get away from this soul-dwarfing round meant much. She felt herself reasoning desperately that the frying pan could not be worse than the fire, and held at least the merit of greater dignity and freedom from the twin evils of poverty and thankless domestic slavery.

While she considered this pro and con, shrinking from such a step one hour, considering it soberly the next, the days dragged past in wearisome se-

quence. The great depth of snow endured, was added to by spasmodic flurries. The frosts held. The camp seethed with the restlessness of the men. In default of the daily work that consumed their superfluous energy, the loggers argued and fought, drank and gambled, made rough-house in their sleeping quarters till sometimes Stella's cheeks blanched and she expected murder to be done. Twice the *Chickamin* came back from Roaring Springs with whisky aboard, and a protracted debauch ensued. Once a drunken logger shouldered his way into the kitchen to leer unpleasantly at Stella; and himself inflamed by liquor and the affront, Charlie Benton beat the man until his face was a mass of bruises. That was only one of a dozen brutal incidents. All the routine discipline of the woods seemed to have slipped out of Benton's hands. When the second whisky consignment struck the camp, Stella stayed in her room, refusing to cook until order reigned again. Benton grumblingly took up the burden himself. With Katy's help, and that of sundry loggers, he fed the roistering crew; but for his sister it was a two-day period of protesting disgust.

That mood, like so many of her moods, relapsed into dogged endurance. She took up the work again when Charlie promised that no more whisky should be allowed in the camp.

"Though it's ten to one I won't have a corporal's guard left when I want to start work again," he grumbled. "I'm well within my rights if I put my foot down hard on any jinks when there's work, but I have no license to set myself up as guardian of a logger's morals and pocketbook when I have nothing for him to do. These fellows are paying their board. So long as they don't make themselves obnoxious to you, I don't see that it's our funeral whether they're drunk or sober. They'd tell me so, quick enough!"

To this pronouncement of expediency Stella made no rejoinder. She no longer expected anything much of Charlie in the way of consideration. So far as she could see, she, his sister, was little more to him than one of his loggers; a little less important than, say, his donkey engineer. In so far as she conduced to the well-being of the camp, and effected a saving to his credit in the matter of preparing food, he valued her, and was willing to concede a minor point to satisfy her. Beyond that, Stella felt that he did not go. Five years in totally different environments had dug a great gulf between them. He felt an arbitrary sense of duty toward her, she knew, but in its manifestations it never lapped over the bounds of his own immediate self-interest.

And so, when she blundered upon knowledge of a state of affairs which must have existed under her very nose for some time, there were few remnants of sisterly affection to bid her seek extenuating circumstances.

Katy John proved the final straw. Just by what means Stella grew to suspect any such moral lapse on Benton's part is wholly irrelevant. Once the unpleasant likelihood came to her notice, she took measures to verify her suspicion. Once convinced, she taxed her brother with it, to his utter confusion.

"What kind of a man are you?" she cried at last, in shamed anger. "Is there nothing too low for you to dabble in? Haven't you any respect for anything or anybody, yourself included?"

"Oh, for the love of Mike can that Puritan stuff!" Benton growled, though his tanned face was burning. "This is what comes of having women around the camp. I'll send the girl away."

"You—you beast!" she flared, and ran out of the kitchen to seek refuge in her own room and cry into her pillow some of the dumb protest that surged up within her.

Stella Benton passed, that morning,

through successive stages of shocked amazement, of pity, and disgust. As between her brother and the Siwash girl, she saw little to choose. From her virtuous pinnacle, she abhorred both. If she had to continue intimate living with them, she felt that she would be utterly defiled, degraded to their level. That was her first definite conclusion.

After a time, she heard Benton come into their living room and light a fire in the heater. She dried her eyes and went out to face him.

"Charlie," she declared desperately, "I can't stay here any longer! It's simply impossible!"

"Don't start that song again! We've had it often enough!" he answered stubbornly. "You're not going—not till spring. I'm not going to let you go in the frame of mind you're in right now, anyhow. You'll get over that. Forget it!"

Benton got the fire going and went out. She saw him cross to the kitchen, and later she saw Katy John leave the camp, with all her belongings in a bundle over her shoulder, trudging away to the camp of her people around the point.

Kipling's pregnant line shot across her mind:

"For the colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady are sisters under their skins."

"I wonder," she mused, "I wonder if we are? I wonder if that poor little, brown-skinned fool isn't, after all, as much a victim as I am?"

She looked out along the shores, piled high with broken ice and snow, through a misty air, to distant mountains that lifted imperiously aloof white spires against the sky; over a forest all draped in winter robes; shore, mountains, and forest, alike, chill and hushed and desolate. The lake spread its forty-odd miles in a boomerang curve from Roaring Springs to Fort Douglas, a cold, lifeless gray. She sat a long time looking at that, and a dead weight seemed to settle upon her heart. For the second time that day she broke down. Not the shamed, indignant weeping of an hour earlier, but with the essence of all things forlorn and desolate in her checked sobs.

She did not hear Jack Fyfe come in. She did not dream he was there until she felt his hand gently on her shoulder and so looked up; and so deep was her despondency, so keen the unassuaged craving for some human sympathy, some measure of understanding, that she made no effort to remove his hand.

"What iss?" he said softly. "What's the trouble now?"

Briefly she told him, the barriers of her habitual reserve swept aside before the essentially human need to share a burden that has grown too great to bear alone.

"Oh, thunder!" Fyfe grunted, when she had finished. "This isn't any place for you at all!"

He slid his arm across her shoulder and tilted her face with his other hand so that her eyes met his; and she felt no desire to draw away, nor any of that old instinct to be on her guard against him. For all she knew—indeed, by all she had been told—Jack Fyfe was tarred with the same stick as her brother. But she had no thought of resisting him, no feeling of repulsion.

"Will you marry me, Stella?" he asked evenly. "I can free you from this sort of thing forever."

Stella looked up at him, then out over the banked snow, and all the dreary discomforts, the mean drudgery, the sordid shifts she had been put to for months, rose up in disheartening phalanx. For that moment, Jack Fyfe loomed like a tower of refuge. She trusted him now. She had a feeling that, even if she grew to dislike him, she would still trust him. He would

play fair. If he said he would do this or that, she could bank on it absolutely.

She turned, and looked at him searchingly a long half minute, wondering what really lay behind the blue eyes that met her own so steadfastly. He stood waiting patiently, outwardly impassive. But she could feel through the thin stuff of her dress a quiver in the fingers that rested on her shoulder; and that repressed sign of the man's pent-up feeling gave her an odd thrill, moved her strangely, swung the pendulum of her impulse.

"Yes," she said.

Fyfe bent a little lower.

"Listen," he said in characteristically blunt fashion. "You want to get away from here. There is no sense in our fussing or hesitating about what we're going to do, is there?"

"No, I suppose not," she agreed.

"I'll send the *Panther* down to the Springs for Lefty Howe's wife," he outlined his plans unhesitatingly. "She'll get up here this evening. To-morrow we will go down and take the train to Vancouver and be married. You have plenty of good clothes, good enough for Vancouver. I know"—with a whimsical smile—"because you had when you came last summer, and you've had no chance to wear them out. Then we'll go somewhere—California, Florida—and come back to Roaring Lake in the spring. You'll have all the bad taste of this out of your mouth by that time."

Stella nodded acquiescence. Better to make the plunge boldly, since she had elected to make it.

"All right. I'm going to tell Benton," Fyfe said. "Good-by till to-morrow."

She stood up. He looked at her a long time earnestly, searchingly, one of her hands imprisoned tight between his two big palms. Then, before she was quite aware of his intention, he kissed her gently on the mouth, and was gone.

CHAPTER XIV.

SO THEY WERE MARRIED——

This turn of events left Benton dumfounded, to use a trite but expressive phrase. He came in, apparently to look at Stella in amazed curiosity, for at first he had nothing to say. He sat down beside his makeshift desk and pawed over some papers, running the fingers of one hand through his thick brown hair.

"Well, sis," he blurted out at last, "I suppose you know what you're doing?"

"I think so," Stella returned composedly.

"But why all this mad haste?" he asked. "If you're going to get married, why didn't you let me know, so I could give you some sort of decent send-off?"

"Oh, thanks," she returned dryly. "I don't think that's necessary. Not at this stage of the game, as you occasionally remark."

He ruminated upon this a minute, flushing slightly.

"Well, I wish you luck," he said, sincerely enough. "Though I can hardly realize this sudden-death move. You and Jack Fyfe may get on all right. He's a good sort—in his way."

"His way suits me," she said, spurred to the defensive by what she deemed a note of disparagement in his utterance. "If you have any objections or criticisms, you can save your breath—or address them direct to Mr. Fyfe."

"No, thank you!" He grinned. "I don't care to get into any argument with *him,* especially as he's going to be my brother-in-law. Fyfe's all right. I didn't imagine he was the sort of man you'd fancy, that's all."

Stella refrained from any comment on this. She had no intention of admitting to Charlie that marriage with Jack Fyfe commended itself to her chiefly as an avenue of escape from a well-nigh intolerable condition which he himself had inflicted upon her. Her

pride rose in arms against any such belittling admission. She admitted it frankly to herself, and to Fyfe, because Fyfe understood, and was content with that understanding. She desired to forget that phase of the transaction. She told herself that she meant honestly to make the best of it.

Benton turned again to his papers. He did not broach the subject again until next day, when in the distance the squat hull of the *Panther* began to show on her return from the Springs. Then he came to where Stella was putting the last of her things into her trunk. He had some bank notes in one hand, and a check.

"Here's that ninety I borrowed, Stell," he said. "And a check for your back pay. Things have been sort of lean around here, maybe, but I still think it's a pity you couldn't have stuck it out till it came smoother. I hate to see you going away with a chronic grouch against me. I suppose I wouldn't even be a welcome guest at the wedding?"

"No," she said unforgivingly. "Some things are a little too—too recent."

"Oh!" he replied, casually enough, pausing in the doorway a second on his way out, "you'll get over that. You'll find that ordinary, everyday living isn't any kid-glove affair."

She sat on the closed lid of her trunk, looking at the check and money. Three hundred and sixty dollars, all told. A month ago, that would have spelled freedom, a chance to try her luck in less desolate fields. Well, she tried to consider the thing philosophically, it was no use to bewail what might have been. In her hands now lay the sinews of a war she had foregone all need of waging. It did not occur to her to welch on her bargain with Jack Fyfe. She had given her promise. According to her lights, she was bound irrevocably. Indeed, for the moment, she was glad of that. She was worn out, all weary with unaccustomed stress of body and mind. To her, just then, rest seemed the sweetest boon in the world.

And so it was a pale, weary-eyed young woman, dressed in the same plain, tailored suit she had worn into the country, who was cuddled to Mrs. Howe's plump bosom when she went aboard the *Panther* for the first stage of her journey.

A slaty bank of cloud spread a somber film across the sky. When the *Panther* laid her ice-sheathed guard rail against the Hot Springs wharf the sun was down. The lake spread, gray and lifeless, under a gray sky, and Stella Benton's spirits were steeped in that same dour color.

TO BE CONTINUED IN THE APRIL 20TH POPULAR.

THE WHOLE THING OR NOTHING

THE platforms of the woman suffragists are becoming broader and broader every year. They cover more and more ground and demand more things, among which are included perfect equality with man and, at times, absolute freedom from the drudgery of housekeeping and similar cares.

One of these advanced suffragists, who had not yet freed herself entirely from the work of housekeeping, was called to her front door one morning by a salesman.

"Madam," he began his spiel, "I want to sell you a patented self-wringing rag, which never fails to——"

"Don't annoy me with such things," she replied, with great indignation. "Don't come to me again until you can sell me a self-washing dish."

Some Correspondence Regarding a Gasoline Motor

By David Henry Day

The expurgated letters of a farmer who gets the motor-boat craze and buys a two-cylinder gasoline engine

SPARKVILLE, May 10th. 1915.
BENZINE MOTOR CO.
Gastown, N. Y.

GENTS: The gasolene engine I ordered from you received by freight yesterday also book of instructions all compleat and have set same up in my barn according to book of instructions but have not been able to run same yet on account of your not haveing sent no spark pluggs nor batterys nor wires to connect batterys and spark pluggs. also propellor wheel seems to be missing and muffeler for engine though I dont need the muffeler until engine is installed in boat which is not quite finished but will be soon ina few days. The reason I am setting up engine in barn is to test it out thoroughly before installing it in boat so as to save trouble after engine is installed in boat.
Please ship required missing parts by express soon as possible and oblidge

yours truly
HIRAM DIGGS.

P. S. The crank which is used to grind the engine by hand to start it is also missing. please also send it with other missing parts.

SPARKVILLE, May 15th.
BENZINE MOTOR CO.
Gastown, N. Y.

GENTS: The missing parts which I wrote for on the tenth came by Express today charges $3.96 think I was soaked by the Express co all right but they was one spark plugg missing please send the other by Parsel Post as you evedently forgot about the engine haveing 2 cylinders therefor needing 2 spark pluggs. what makes the engine so hard to grind with the crank when the spark plugg is in the whole in the top of the cylinder but so easy when it aint. it is easy enough to grind without plugg screwed in whole but cant hardly grind her around at all when plugg is in Tried to run her with one plugg but could hardly expect to run her with one plugg when she neads 2. will wait untill other plugg is received before starting engine as she wont start with 1

Yours truly
HIRAM DIGGS.

P. S. If you send an other plugg there is only enough wire for 1 plugg so please send like amount of wire for the other plug that you send by return mail parcel Post.

SPARKVILLE, May 28th 1915.
BENZINE MOTOR CO.
Gastown, N. Y.

GENTS: What did you have to do make that spark plugg to order. you took so long to send it but it come today about ten a m today. something is wrong with engine because with 2 spark pluggs in wholes as per directions it is imposible to grind the crank around easy. and an other thing it says the coils should buzz when you

grind the crank around but nothing buzzes and it says that spark plugs should show intense blew spark if layed on top of cylinder and crank is ground around but no spark is to be seen. I followed instructions in book to the letter but engine refuses to run as per directions cant even get one explosion probably on account of haveing no buzz Ben Howard come over this p m to look her over and they say he is an expert and knows all about gasolene engines. I ground the crank around and Ben says she dont buzz and she ought to buzz when you grind the crank around. then he fixed several things and says turn her over now and see if she buzzes and I says no how can we turn her over when she is bolted down solid to the planks as per directions. but he means grinding the crank around when he says turn her over because hes an expert and knows how to say them things, not realy turning the hole engine over but only the crank. well, after awhile she buzzed when I ground the crank around but she would also buzz when I wasent grinding the crank and I says to Ben there shes buzzing. but Ben says that aint no engine buzzing thats a hoarse fly on the window pain. I tell you it aint easy to fool an expert like Ben but the buzz fooled me all right me not knowing what sort of a buzz to expect. it was a joke on me all right.

please answer by return mail about the buzz and what to do when the coils wont buzz when instructions are followed and how to make them buzz as Ben says that engine wont run without the buzz and Ben is an expert gasolene enginear.

Yours truly

HIRAM DIGGS.

SPARKVILLE, May 29th 1915.

BENZINE MOTOR CO.

GENTS: Ben Howard was over again today to look at gasolene engine you sold me. him and me worked at it all day and my hands is all soar from grinding the crank around. Ben says its all o k about it being hard to grind when spark pluggs is screwed in wholes as that is the compresion which is fine he says. Ben changed the directions of the coils and wires and at last the coils buzzed as per instructions but gave me a fearful shock all threw my body me haveing hold of the spark pluggs at time of the buzz. the shock through me clean acrost the barn into old Petes stall my mule and its luckey for me that old Pete wasent there. so we got her buzzing o k but she wont run nor start nor nothing only buzz but she buzzes fine.

Ben and me read the instruction book and it says that if engine refuses to start it is due to one of the following causes two rich a mixture. two lean a mixture. broken primery wire. broken high tension wire. batterys run down. loose connections in wires. water in gasolene. needle valve stopped up or closed. supply pipe clogged. wrong adjustment of spark coil. dirt in timer contacts. flooding of crank case. weak spring in timer. water in engine cylinder. spark plugg pints two far apart. or two close togather. cracked porcelains. Short circuit in primery wires. Grounding of high tension wires. exhaust pipe clogged. poor compression. or spark two far advanced or retarded.

Ben says it must be one of them things and he is an expert and knows about it all right and he says if we knew which one it was sheed be all right if we fixed it.. please answer quick and let me know which of all them things is the matter with the engine and oblige

Yours truly

HIRAM DIGGS.

SPARKVILLE, May 30th. 1915.

GENTS: The trouble wasent any of them things I wrote about yesterday but

was because we forgot to put gasoline in the tank. when error was discovered and tank filled as per directions there was a different action to the engine entirely. several times it came pretty near running and almost started several times. my hands is getting pretty soar from grinding the crank around so mutch and Ben cant grind it on account of having hart trouble that makes it bad for him to do violent work. but once when I was grinding the crank there was a loud explosion and the crank through me clean acrost the barn and into old Petes stall and this time Pete was there and he kicked backwards and knocked me clean across the barn. After that the engine died. kindly let me know what the trouble is by return mail and oblidge

your's truly

HIRAM DIGGS.

SPARKVILLE June 1th. 1915.

GENTS: Well you needent tell me whats the matter with the gasolene engine I wrote about because theres nothing the matter shes a dandy the finest in the land and runs finely. I turned the crank this a m just for fun not expecting shed run nor nothing but she started off big as life running fine and when Ben comes over we are going to install her into the boat. have invited six of my friends to have a ride with me tomorrow afternoon at 2 p m when all will be ready and boat lunched in the lake at 1.30 p m all aready to take my friends for a fine ride on the lake all afternoon. I am happy to say that I wont need to bother you no more as all my troubles are over so no more from

your friend

HIRAM DIGGS.

SPARKVILLE June 2th. 1915.

GENTS: Well gents I regret to say that I am thoroughly disgustid with the engine which you sold me and which I payed you good money for. today the boat was lunched in the lake as per agreement and I invited my friends to step inn and have a ride with me all around the lake with me in my new boat. Ben tryed to start the engine but nothing doing and we all tryed grinding the crank until everybody got tired and went home laughing at my hard luck and engine. an automobeel man come along in an automobeel and stopped and looked at us and asked us what was the matter and Ben told him how week the engine was stopping when the clutch was throwed in and the feller listened to the engine and says you darned fools she is going on one leg. and I says do you mean me on account of where Pete kicked me in the middle of the week when the engine and him kicked back and rentched my knee and I been limping on one leg ever since and the feller says no you rummy the forward cylinder of the engine is missing and he drove off laughing fit to kill himself. thats a fine business for a big consern like yours to take a mans money and send him an engine with the forward cylinder missing and causing all this worry and trouble and useless hard work. send at once by express PREPAID one forward cylinder to fit engine because I have been put to enough trouble and expence already by your carlesness or something. your book says this engine is fool proof well maybe it is but I think it is proof a fool made it or something when he would send it to me with the forward cylinder missing like you done.

yours

HIRAM DIGGS.

SPARKVILLE, June 3th. 1915.

GENTS: The automobeel feller was over here today and he explained about the missing cylinder which wasent really missing but only an expression used by experts only Ben dident know about it.

it means that the spark plugg wasent sparking in the cylinder which was missing but was there all right but not working no more than if it was really missing. he sold me a new spark plugg for $5 which works fine and Ben says he soaked me for the price but I dont care it works so fine its worth a $5 soak and the engine started off in fine shape. your letter of a few days ago says that the reason the engine wouldent run then was because the batterys was probably run down but they wasent. but in case they should run down please send instructions for winding them up again also key for same as no key came with the outfit only key to the propeller shaft which wasent a key at all only named that but a peace of square steal.

yours very truly

HIRAM DIGGS.

Sparkville June 5rd 1915.

GENTS: There is something wrong with gasolene engine you sold me and I wish it made wright immediately or money back by return mail or express money order. sometimes it runs fine and sometimes it dont run at all for no reason at all. this morning for two hours it run me across the lake and half way back and then it stopped for no reason at all just stopped with nobody touching it or going near it or nothing just stopped. and it aint run since nor it wont. catalogue says only three moving parts to this engine wonderfully simple fool proof a child can run it. it aint none of them things and a lot more. it aint simple because nobody understands it not even Ben Howard and hes an expert and it aint fool proof because I been working on it all day since it stopped and it wont run a lick and thats no sort of engine to send to a cash customer. I had to row the —— boat home which was five miles on a hot day. and any time I want to row a boat I can get a nice light row boat to row and not row no heavy motor boat with a six hundred pound —— gasolene engine in it to boot. send me an other engine that will run. this —— engine expects to be the passenger half the time and me the engine rowing the engine in the boat all over the —— lake especially when the sun is extra hot like it was today. Im clean mad all the way threw at the way I have been treated and trust Ive maid myself plane and unmistakable about this —— engine. will expect my money back in full or a new engine by return mail. yours HIRAM DIGGS.

Sparkville. Jun 7 1915.

GENTS: Your letter received today but youre letters always explain something that happened before the last time I wrote to you. I and Ben discovered our trouble of yesterday was due to lack of sufficient gasoline in the tank same being empty with nothing in it on account of contents having been used up by extra tripp across the lake and forgetting to fill it. the automobeel man discovered trouble after Ben and me had worked for six hours last night. he opened the carburetor and no gasoline run out, and he said is the exasperater all right and I says this engine isent got any I guess and he grunted kind of contempuous and says thats one thing all gasolene engines *has* got. and stuck a stick in the gasoline tank and says fill your tank you rummys and she will run. But this wouldent have happened if you had an exasperater. so please send me an exasperater proper size for this engine by return mail if small enough if not by express. It seems strange that you would send out an engine without an exasperater for the outomobile man says that all gasoline engines has them and has them plenty thats his exact words.

I expect engine would be satisfactory all right if fully equipped with proper exasperater and am willing to keep it

under such circumstances but not otherwise. yours truly HIRAM DIGGS.

Sparkville, Jun 9th 1915.

GENTS: This —— engine stops when theres nothing the matter with it thats the trouble. it wouldent bee so bad if it stopped for some reason and god knows theres reasons enough for it to stop. and why cant it pick out one of them reasons for stopping instead of stopping for no reason at all so that no one cant find the reason because you cant find the reason can you when there aint no reason thats common sence aint it. suppose sir Isack Walton seen the apple fall from the tree for no reason at all but just fall. heed a had a fine time discovering the law of gravity wouldent he because gravity was the reason why the apple fell wasent it. well, how about discovering the reason why this gasoline engine stops when there aint no reason. it just stops without no reason. how can you find the cause without theres a reason for the cause of its stopping. Ben Howard brought over one of his books about gasoline engines and theres a place where it says reasons why engine refuses to start and there is a list of 97 reasons but it aint none of them but no reason at all thats what makes me so —— mad because there aint no reason. yours

HIRAM DIGGS.

Sparkville Jun 15th 1915.

GENTS: I received the book which you sent me which is named What Makes the Gasoline Engine Go. I aint read it yet because whats the use reading it when I dont care what makes the gasoline engine go as long as it goes which mine dont only occasionally when not particularly needed but when just experimenting or something. what I want to know is What Makes the Gasoline Engine Stop. if you got a book called that send me one and thats what I want to know particularly what makes my gasoline engine stop when everything is o k and nothing is the matter except it must be a rotten engine. Ben Howard says if he was me hed sue you for damidges besides for full amount I payed for engine and all express charges. But all I want is a run for my money and this engine dont run thats all or Ill put it in the hands of a lawyer and have him sue you for damidges like Ben Howard says. yours truly HIRAM DIGGS.

Sparkville Jun 30eth 1915.

GENTS: Well gents the gasolene engine is working finely at last but I don't know why. Ben Howard and me worked on it for about a weak but dident do nothing to it in particular and all of a sudden she begun to run and she has been running fine ever since. I thought you might want to know this on account of my having had some little trouble before not amounting to mutch however. am well pleased with engine and with our seccess so wont trouble you no more on account of understanding engine better and having more experience in running her. yours truly HIRAM DIGGS.

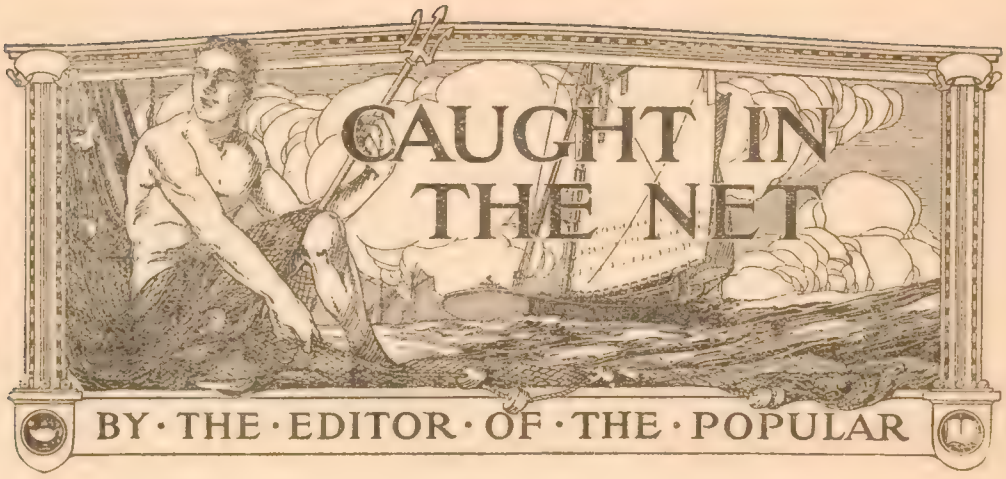
Sparkville July 29th 1915.

BENZINE MOTOR CO.
GASTOWN, N. Y.

GENTS: In reply to your letter asking me for testy monial for your engine sold to me last may will state that I sold same to Pete Schwatrz the dutchman that lives acrost the lake. He is now in the lunatic asylum at Bugville this state, but you might write to him at that place and get testy monial from him as he is present owner of engine if he knows enough to write. yours truly HIRAM DIGGS.

P. S.

There wasent ever nothing the matter with engine; only me and Ben Howard. she was all right when we knew how.



UNREAL REALITY

DID it ever strike you as paradoxical that, while we will not pause to give a penny to a beggar on the street, we will gladly pay two dollars to see an actor play a mendicant rôle, applaud him to the skies, and be the means of raising his weekly salary to a figure that would maintain the genuine beggar for a whole year?

Moreover, we are likely to exclaim at the actor's mimicry: "How amazingly like real life!" And if we deign to comment at all upon the street beggar, the chances are that we will say: "A faker, there's no doubt of it!"

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE TEN-CENT STORES

ON a recent Saturday night, we were in a mining town in the Middle West; a town that the war has put into a feverish rush of prosperity. The miners are all paid Saturday afternoon, and that evening is the big time of the week.

The stores, the pool rooms, the saloons, the shows, even the banks, were open that night. The saloons were busy, there were crowds at the picture shows, but the biggest crowd of all was at the ten-cent stores. The aisles were jammed, and there was a waiting line across the sidewalk, trying to get in. Those who came out carried toys for the kiddies, soap, cooking utensils, household necessities—gifts. And it was the most cheerful of all the crowds we saw.

The growth of the ten-cent store has been amazing. No town of any size—and some that have no size—but has a ten-cent store. And they are patronized not only by the poor; but often the well-to-do and wealthy are there, crowding around the loaded counters.

The appeal of the ten-cent store is an interesting bit of commercial psychology. First there is that definiteness of cost that nearly all buyers like. Almost every buyer likes to know exactly what a thing costs before he ever considers it. The price is really the first question in his mind. In these stores the question is answered, before it is asked, by the display counters.

Another appeal is, it feeds one's curiosity as to what can be found among all the welter of ten-cent articles which one would rather have than his dime. It is a sort of matching game. You enter without anything in mind, and stroll about, looking for something that will tempt you to part with a dime—and usually finding it.

But the very strongest appeal is the freedom from any sense of cheapness which most people feel when they go into a regular store and must ask for low-priced goods. In the ten-cent store every one is on equality, and the buyer does not have to say to the clerk in a blushing undertone: "Haven't you something on that order for a dime?"

Here one sees what he is to buy before he buys it; knows what it costs without asking; and feels as rich as any other ten-cent customer in the store.

OPTIMISM

THE man whose sublime ignorance led him to define the words "optimist" and "pessimist" as respectively an eye doctor and a foot doctor was not more than half wrong, if you will accept that optimism may imply a certain operation of sight that enables one to see into the future with eyes of faith.

Of late, we have noted a slight stigma attach itself to the word optimism, many people regarding it as descriptive of the principal quality of a visionary who dreams of a luminous to-morrow while sitting in the ashes of yesterday. "Oh, he is an incurable optimist!" you will hear repeated of a man who, Micawberlike, waits for "something to turn up," doing nothing meanwhile. But true optimism is quite the opposite of dawdling impracticability. It may beget the dreamer, it is true, but it is primarily the mother of action.

In a nation, as well as in an individual, optimism is an indispensable quality if you desire progress, power, and achievement. Consult history a moment for verification. Speaking nationally, we can ourselves cite the effects of optimism versus pessimism in the contrasting cases of India and the United States. Pessimism came out of India, where the worthlessness of life is a religion. There, the pains of life are held to be so much greater than its pleasures that extinction—Nirvana—is held above all rewards. Of our own country, we may truthfully say that optimism discovered and settled it, and that the same spirit has brought it to the present place it occupies among the great nations of the earth. Without exception, we think, our heroes and leaders have been "incurable optimists." And we dare say that in being so they merely followed the examples of the great and good men of the world.

Pause for a moment and review in your mind the supreme moments of history that have stirred your imagination and heart. Have they not been largely bound up in this wonderful quality? Are you not more thrilled by a hero in defeat vowing to surmount all obstacles and enemies than by the victory itself? Thermopylæ may move you to your depths; but Socrates in his cell, doomed to death and dying, and smilingly telling his friends of his belief in the immortality of the soul, moves you to depths and heights that are beyond expression. How unlike was Socrates to the pessimist philosophers—Epicurus, blasé and immoral; Proclus, who taught that the evolution of the world was away from the divine; Schopenhauer and his disciple Hartmann, who foresaw and declared that intelli-

gence would conquer the will to live, and, as a consequence, the suicide of the world!

Therefore let us not lose nor decry optimism. It is part of youth and morning, love and laughter. It is compounded of hope, faith, and imagination, while pessimism is apathy, ease, and despair. Where pessimism sees failure ahead, optimism sees success. Where pessimism would lead to passive acceptance of things as they are, optimism leads to active regeneration of things as they ought to be.

WHEN R. L. S. WROTE "TREASURE ISLAND"

REREADING the volumes of Robert Louis Stevenson's inimitable letters—"inimitable" was one of his favorite words—we discovered fresh delight in those passages referring to his work on "Treasure Island," the novel that was to be the first to bring him the delectable fruits of fame. The story was begun and developed during the wet and cold August of 1881, in Braemar, Scotland. His stepson, Lloyd Osborne, then a lad in knee breeches, asked Stevenson why he didn't write a story of pirate adventure—a story without women and love in it. Always a boy at heart himself, Robert Louis took to the idea with enthusiasm. Under the date of August 25th, he wrote his friend, William E. Henley, a long, vivacious letter, outlining the project, of which we cull the following:

"I am now on another lay, purely owing to Lloyd, this one; . . . now, see here, 'The Sea Cook, or Treasure Island: a Story for Boys.' . . . If this don't fetch the kids, why, they have gone rotten since my day. Will you be surprised to learn that it is about buccaneers, that it begins in the *Admiral Benbow* public house, on Devon Coast, that it's all about a map and a treasure and a mutiny and a derelict ship and a current and a fine old Squire Trelawney—the real Tre, purged of literature and sin, to suit the infant mind—and a doctor and another doctor and a sea cook with one leg, and a sea song with the chorus 'Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum'—at the third Ho, you heave at the capstan bars. . . . Two chapters are written, and have been tried on Lloyd with great success; the trouble is to work it off without oaths. Buccaneers without oaths—bricks without straw. But youth and the fond parent have to be consulted. . . . A chapter a day I mean to do; they are short; and perhaps in a month 'The Sea Cook' may to Routledge [a publisher] go, yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum! . . . It's awful fun, boys' stories; you just indulge the pleasure of your heart, that's all; no trouble, no strain. The only stiff thing is to get it ended—that I don't see, but I look to a volcano."

As he got more and more into the yarn, Stevenson waxed effervescent and planned to do a whole series of boys' books concerning highwaymen and other picturesque miscreants, and he declared that he would rival Harrison Ainsworth at his own game. Meanwhile, the book progressed swiftly, so that in September it had reached the sixteenth chapter, and the author made an agreement with the publisher of *Young Folks* whereby he was to receive about ten dollars and a half for each forty-five hundred words! Not a very noble remuneration, but Stevenson did not grumble. Instead, he wrote Henley:

"'The Sea Cook' is now in its sixteenth chapter, and bids for well up in the thirties. Each three chapters is worth two pounds ten shillings. So we've twelve pounds ten shillings already."

In the winter of 1881-82, the story was completed. A year later, it was brought out in book form, for the rights of which Stevenson received five hundred dollars, which he considered far in excess of its worth!

Of the character of Silver in the tale, he said, in a letter to Henley: "I will now make a confession. It was the sight of your maimed strength and masterfulness that begot John Silver in 'Treasure Island.' Of course, he is not in any other quality or feature the least like you; but the idea of the maimed man, ruling and dreaded by the sound, was entirely taken from you."

The novel did not escape criticism. One man took the author to task for his poor seamanship. Another found fault with his geography. Burne-Jones, the painter, thought he detected something of Defoe in the narrative. To this, Stevenson replied to Sidney Colvin:

"'T. I.' came out of Kingsley's 'At Last,' where I got the Dead Man's Chest—and that was the seed—and out of the great Captain Johnson's 'History of Notorious Pirates.' The scenery is Californian in part and in part *chic!*"

THE TWO SIDES

THE town is so well known all over the world that we need not name it, except to say that it is veritably one big hospital, where two famous surgeon brothers perform daily miracles in saving lives of those given up by their confrères. Frequently, not only their cures astonish, but their fees as well. To us, on the wings of rumor, came a story of an American multimillionaire, whose righted kneecap had cost him five thousand dollars; a charge that he brought to court, and which the law compelled him to pay.

"What an outrageous holdup!" we thought to ourselves.

But before we had left that hospital town, Dame Rumor had whispered to us quite another story. A poor widow had taken her little, spine-crippled girl to the wonderful surgeons. As is their custom, they ascertained her resources, and found out that she had mortgaged her farm for medical advice prior to bringing the child to them, and had sold her only cow as the last resort of seeking their help. Followed the successful operation on the little girl; and, the mother also learned, to her complete astonishment, that the doctors had performed another feat: they had paid off the mortgage on her home, and had bought another cow for her!

"What magnificent philanthropy!" we thought to ourselves.

BUSINESS AND PLEASURE HAND IN HAND

GETTING down to business" does not necessarily mean getting up early in the morning, and there are successful men who conduct some of their affairs by telephone while in bed; and there are more important matters settled over lunch than one stops to consider; and at a frivolous *thé dansant* we have known of a dicker that stirred Wall Street. Business need not interfere with pleasure—you may command a commercial situation from a feather pillow, buy a railroad while picking an ortolan, or arrange to corner the market between a tango and a fox trot.

South of the Line

By Ralph Stock

IV.—THE BEETLE

"MY dear Margaret, I shouldn't suggest such a course if I didn't think it best for both our interests."

The speech was typical of Gerald Hetherington. Whenever he prefaced his remarks with an endearment, his sister knew he was about to say something particularly aggravating; and in this instance, as in every other since he had left Sydney University at the death of his father to help manage the family estate of Malina, Meg was not mistaken. He wanted her to sell the place now.

They were in the mosquito-proof room, going over the plantation accounts. Meg always showed her brother the books, though it was his frequent boast that they were beyond his comprehension. He assumed the attitude of the æsthete who scorns such prosaic details as figures, when, as a matter of fact, he was uncommonly quick at them where his own interests were concerned.

Meg subjected him to a speculative scrutiny across the plain deal table that served Malina as a writing desk. Like most elder sisters, and a goodly number of younger ones, she knew her brother to his very marrow; but that mysterious force called blood relationship prevented her from admitting, even to herself, that Gerald could be the pedantic, mean-souled little creature that he was. Instead, she tried to look at things from his point of view. She could even see that her own objections might be illogical, but they were none the less strong.

She went to the window and looked over the sun-bathed compound toward her last achievement—ten acres of virgin soil wrested from the grip of the jungle, and planted to young coconuts—then turned back into the room with set lips.

"I can't, Gerald," she said. "I just can't, that's all."

She saw the quick anger she knew so well flare up in her brother's eyes.

"Malina isn't paying," he snapped.

"At present, no"—Meg stood looking calmly down on him—"but it will."

Gerald jerked his cigarette ash onto the matting of the floor.

"When?" he sneered. "When the young nuts bear, in seven years, I suppose—bar hurricanes. In the meantime, and according to the figures, we're losing about a hundred and fifty a year, and working like horses to do it."

Something very like a smile parted Meg's lips.

"Oh, I know what you're thinking," Gerald burst forth; "that everybody's a slacker except yourself. It's a mania that's making you positively insufferable, Margaret. This is slavery to me, whatever it is to you, and it's doing neither of us any good. That's the absurdity of it."

"There's another way of looking at it," said Margaret, when the storm had died down to indistinct mutterings. "I

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mean apart from the monetary side. Father left us Malina——"

"*You,* you mean."

"Very well—left *me* Malina to try and work for our benefit, not to sell. I don't think he would wish us to sell."

Gerald waved a long, thin hand impatiently.

"Sickly sentimentality," he scoffed. "You may have noticed how much interest he took in the place when he was running it himself."

Meg winced. She would never forget those last years with a mat-fevered* father, and Gerald was so like him sometimes, so uncannily like that it almost frightened her.

"Besides," she fenced desperately, "it's not fair to Malina. Give it time to pick up. I can't see why you're so anxious to sell now."

"I want a chance to live—you know my views."

"But you tried that before, and—and ——"

"I came home, I know. I found that it is impossible to live without money—even in these benighted parts. Look here, Margaret"—Gerald leaned forward with an air of earnest magnanimity—"sell Malina, and give me my share—less than my share, if you like—and I won't trouble you again. You know that I wasn't cut out for this nigger-driving business; that I'm more of a nuisance than anything else. Give me my share and let me go."

Meg still regarded him with the motherly, contemplative gaze that her brother had come to detest.

"I don't think it would be wise," she said slowly, after a pause.

This was altogether too much for Gerald. He leaped from his chair with dramatic abruptness and confronted her, trembling with rage.

"Then I am to understand that you won't sell!" he jerked out. "You won't sell, in spite of reason, ruination—everything!"

"No," Meg answered, with quiet finality, "I don't think I should be doing right to sell now, Gerald."

Her brother stared at her, wide-eyed, for an instant, as though hardly crediting such barefaced opposition to his will, then flung back his head and strode from the room.

Meg watched him slam the compound gate, mount his Tongan pony, and canter up the hill track. She knew where her brother was going—to Sonomo, in search of "life," as it may still be lived South of the Line. In the morning, or perhaps three days later, he would return, pale, taciturn. The rest she had heard indirectly, for even South Sea beaches have their prying eyes and wagging tongues.

Tears trembled in her eyes as she turned from the window, but Meg Hetherington was of the kind that seldom lets them fall. Crossing the room to the writing table, she stood for a long moment staring at the blotting pad, then sat down and wrote: "Dear Mr. Brend." This she tore up deliberately. A second attempt met with the same fate, and a third. Then, on an impulse, she wrote two words in a firm, clear hand—"Gerald again"—and addressed the envelope to John Brend, Fiji Club, Suva.

The house boy took this strange document to the resident doctor, three miles away, whose launch started for Suva the next morning.

Already Meg felt relief. She was experiencing, for the first time in her lonely life, the joy of having one true friend. She fell to thinking of him, counting the days it would take him to reach Malina, and ended by humming a little air to herself as she prepared the spare room. It may be noted that there was no doubt in her mind that he would come.

And she was not mistaken. Three

*South Sea parlance for degenerate.

days later, the *Margaret* sheered alongside the landing, and Brend stepped ashore. To Meg, his cheery greeting and hearty handshake were as a draft of clear water to a thirsty soul. There was something refreshingly reliable about John Brend, trader.

"It's Gerald," she told him, when tea on the veranda had been disposed of.

"So I gather from your—am I to call it a letter?" Brend suggested, lighting his pipe.

"I didn't know what to say," Meg apologized.

Brend leaned forward in his chair.

"Is it as bad as that?"

"I'm afraid so. Besides"—Meg brushed some imaginary crumbs from her lap—"why should I drag you all this way on—on my affairs?"

"I like that," beamed Brend, "when for the last three weeks I've been trying to manufacture an excuse to come."

"Do you always want an excuse for coming to see people?"

"Either that or an invitation. In this case, it happened to be the invitation—though a brief one."

"I'm making use of you."

"Good!" Brend rubbed his large brown hands between his knees.

Meg smiled as she looked out over the veranda railing, but her face fell suddenly grave.

"And, now I've got you here, I don't know what to say," she confessed.

"Let's leave it at 'Gerald again,'" Brend suggested. "It's enough for me if it is for you. Where is he?"

"At Sonomo."

"How long has he been there?"

"Three days."

"Ah!" Brend contemplated a cloud of tobacco smoke hovering on the still air above his head.

"He wants me to sell Malina," said Meg, after a pause.

"Of course."

"And I feel that I'm driving him to—to Sonomo by not doing as he wishes."

"Do you think it would make any difference?"

"I'm not sure."

"I am," said Brend.

"Besides, Malina isn't paying."

"Then my luck's in," said Brend. "Is there any chance of taking some shares?"

Meg studied him for a moment with her head at an angle. She was thinking of what could be done for Malina with a little ready money just at that time. She saw another ten acres reclaimed and planted to bananas or some quick-bearing crop. It would be the salvation of the place. Then she looked Brend in the eyes and succumbed.

"You're trying to help the sinking ship," she accused.

Brend laughed.

"If you think that," he said, "don't consider my offer. But I should like to know what you imagine I've been beating about the Pacific for during the last nine months. The *Margaret* and I have amassed five hundred pounds—somehow—and I'm not going to let it rest at four per cent a day longer."

"You think Malina promising enough?" Meg regarded him doubtfully.

Brend looked down the hillside to where the palm tops shimmered in the sun like a placid, green sea. It was not for these that he had sailed the Pacific in fair weather and foul for the last nine months. It was for the wisp of humanity with the figure of a girl and the eyes of a woman seated opposite him now, but he did not say so.

"I think so," he answered instead, with just sufficient hesitancy. "Oh, yes, I think so."

The sun sank precipitately into the sea, and they still talked—of such strange things as coconuts, bananas, bush tracks, anything and everything that may be accomplished with hard

cash South of the Line. For the first time in many a long month, Meg succeeded in forgetting her brother—but not so Brend.

Early the next morning, he set out for Sonomo.

Eight hours' climb along narrow tracks, through dim jungle tunnels, and round, jagged masses of volcanic rock, into the very heart of the hills, brought him to the outskirts of the village.

Studiously discarding his tie, and turning down the bottoms of his trousers to avoid any resemblance to a government official, he sauntered down the pandanus avenue.

In the doorway of the guest house squatted the Buli, a wrinkled old sinner, with a bronze mask of a face and an unfortunate habit of scratching himself audibly.

"Sayadra," said Brend, advancing on him with outstretched hand.

The Buli grunted something unintelligible, and hugged a horny heel to his groin.

"I have come to buy copra," Brend announced, and continued in much the same strain for upward of five minutes without making any apparent impression on his audience.

The interview was terminated by the chief taking his departure and leaving his visitor the run of the guest house.

After a meal of roast bush pig and taro, served by cringing women, Brend lay on the mats, pondering ways and means. He knew the type of man he had to deal with in Gerald Hetherington, and the delicacy of the task he had undertaken gave him pause.

Soon after nightfall, he crept out of the house. The avenue was pitch dark, but here and there the faint yellow light of a candlenut filtered through the low doorways on either side. At the largest house in the village, he stopped, and darted into the shadow of the reed wall. Above him loomed the ridgepole of the house, decorated with shells to denote the rank of the owner. It was the Buli's. A crooning song came from within. No other sound disturbed the intense silence of the night. Brend pried apart the reeds of the wall and peered inside. By the light of a hurricane lantern, hung from the raftered roof, he saw a pile of mats in a corner, and Gerald Hetherington sprawled upon them with half-closed eyes. Beside the couch squatted a girl —a Samoan by the fairness of her skin and fine texture of her hair—swaying rhythmically as she droned a meke chant, and occasionally bent over to stir a tanoa bowl of kava. In a far corner, a man lay sleeping on a bamboo pillow.

To Brend, the scene conveyed all that he had guessed. Gerald had failed to learn the lesson that awaits most men South of the Line; that was all.

In the doorway, Brend paused with well-simulated surprise.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "You here?"

At the sound of his voice, Gerald started as though stung, the blood surging to his pale face.

Brend gave no time for awkward pauses, but crossed the room and shook hands.

"Taking it easy, I see," he remarked affably. "No, please don't move. Just what I was looking for!" He leaned down and helped himself to a half coconut shell of kava. "Great tipple!"

Gerald watched him suspiciously. He knew little of Brend except that he seemed a harmless sort of person with an unaccountable penchant for Margaret. Had she sent him? That was impossible, for no one would dream of Sonomo as a haunt.

"Did Margaret say anything about me while you were at Malina?" Gerald asked, almost in spite of himself.

Brend took a leisurely seat on the mats, and drew forth his well-beloved brier. He seemed to be making an

effort of memory as he pressed home the tobacco with his thumb.

"I believe she did say something about your having been away for some time," he said, then looked up with some show of interest. "Is there any copra in Sonomo?"

Gerald was conscious of relief, not unmixed with a certain disappointment. He was glad his sister knew nothing of his movements—just at present—but he felt piqued that his absence from Malina had not made more of an impression. They would all be impressed shortly, he told himself, even stolid, inoffensive old Brend.

"What a beggar you are for the shekels!" he laughed airily. "I believe you dream copra."

"Why not?" said Brend. "It's my living."

"Oh, no reason at all if it's your taste in livings. It doesn't happen to be mine, that's all. I'm going native."

Gerald made this announcement with the air of one launching a thunderbolt, and sat back on the mats to watch its devastating flight. The effect was disappointing. Brend continued to smoke placidly.

"Really?" he commented. "Well, I suppose there are worse ways of getting through life."

The pent-up torrent of argument in Gerald burst bounds.

"I should just think so," he said. "Look here, Brend!" He leaned forward in a sudden access of confidence. "You're a sensible sort; you'll understand a fellow. I wasn't cut out for Malina, and that's a fact. Besides, it isn't paying; but Margaret won't sell; she's as stubborn as a mule, and so we go on, day in, day out, with nothing but quibbles to relieve the monotony. The pater left *her* the place, so I'm powerless there; but I *can* cut out my own line of life, and I'm going to."

"That's all right," said Brend absently; then, after a smoke-wreathed pause: "What do you suppose their output is up here?"

For a moment, Gerald was at a loss —but only for a moment.

"Good heavens, man," he wailed, "can't you forget your precious copra for five minutes? This is vital to me."

"You mean you want to talk about it?"

"Yes."

"Why—when you seem to have made up your mind so thoroughly?"

"Well, a fellow likes another opinion sometimes."

Brend contemplated the youth on the mats with a level, expressionless stare. For a moment, he was sorely tempted to indulge in precisely what the other was looking for—opposition—but refrained. He knew his man too well.

As it was, his silence had a stimulating effect. Gerald launched forth afresh, tabulating the points of his argument on the tips of his long, tapering fingers.

"After all," he contended, "what is life but three meals a day and a bed? I've sieved it down to that, and if you can get them without effort instead of with it, why not? They think a lot of me up here; want to make me chief of the *Matiquali;* sort of blood brotherhood, you know. Well, I can't see anything against it. They're a good deal more civilized than some whites I've met with, and they do look after a fellow. The Buli's promised me this house, and—— But, after all, that doesn't matter greatly; what does matter, to me, is the little lady who went out soon after you came in." Gerald paused for effect. "We're to be married at the Matiquali ceremony. I'm going the whole hog, and I don't care who knows it."

Brend took his pipe from between his teeth and inclined his head.

"Congratulations!" he murmured.

Gerald laughed a trifle raucously.

"Oh, come, now!" he protested.

"Say what you think, man—that it isn't fair to Margaret or myself, that I shall be putting myself beyond the pale, and all the rest of it. I shall be disappointed in you if you don't."

"I'm sorry," said Brend, "but you're a little too rapid for me. I had no intention of saying anything of the sort."

"But you think it?"

Brend's expression was one of vague bewilderment.

"I can't say that, either," he said slowly. "Perhaps it doesn't interest me sufficiently. I suppose you'll do what you want to—if you can."

"If I can?" Gerald was instantly on the alert. "Who's going to stop me?"

Brend shrugged his broad shoulders.

"My dear fellow," he drawled, "please don't snap at me like that. How should I know? But there is just one thing—you won't forget me when—when you come into your 'brotherhood,' or whatever it's going to be, will you?"

"How d'you mean?"

"Well"—Brend shifted the position of his crossed legs with the air of one about to touch upon a delicate subject—"you'll be right in with them. You'll have no end of influence. If you *could* persuade the Buli to part up with what they collect, at anything like a reasonable figure——"

"Copra!" wailed Gerald, and collapsed on the mats.

When he sat up, Brend was still smoking stolidly. Gerald studied him long and earnestly, as though trying to satisfy himself on some point connected with this extraordinary being; then, evidently reaching the conclusion that the case was hopeless, he relapsed into silence and a half coconut shell of kava.

All the next day, and well into the night, Brend was busy. On the one subject of the copra output of Sonomo, he seemed indefatigable. But even in the strenuous life of a South Sea trader, side issues can hardly be ignored, and as long as human nature remains human nature—whether white or brown—he is bound to learn a great deal more than is strictly necessary for the transaction of business.

In short, by means of alternate bribes and threats, Brend found himself in possession of the following facts: The lady's name was Falisi, and she had been successfully stage-managed by her brother Weslie, a cunning, town-bred Samoan. Gerald, susceptible at any time, was completely infatuated. The Buli of Sonomo favored the match for the same reason that most Bulis favor such matches—it is a coveted honor to have a resident white man in one's "capital." It lends a "tone" to proceedings.

Every one seemed so entirely satisfied with the prospect that for a time Brend was at his wit's end how to deal with it. Then, as often happens at such times, he stumbled on the solution in the most unlikely quarter—a small grass house on the outskirts of Sonomo.

Here lived a handsome young native, nursing a bitter grievance against women in general, and Falisi in particular. Had she not jilted him for a shadow of a white man? Had she not listened to the dictates of her brother rather than those of her heart?

Brend sympathized deeply. He spent most of one evening smoking and sympathizing. The handsome young native pointed out that he had no worldly possessions. Brend supplied him with them to such an extent and with such alacrity that the recipient's eyes bulged from his head. The handsome young native pleaded the wrath of the Buli. Brend nullified it by the gift of sufficient gold—solid, yellow gold—for two steerage passages to far-away Samoa, and left him in the seventh heaven of anticipation.

And so it came about that at the great Matiquali ceremony, when the

Buli made an incision on his brawny chest and mingled his lifeblood with Gerald's amid loud tamas, the proceedings were brought to a spectacular standstill by the appearance of Weslie, perspiring, wide-eyed.

"She's gone!" he cried wildly. "Falisi has gone!"

Then followed such a scene as Sonomo had not witnessed since the last secret orgy. The women gathered in corners, cringing and chattering like frightened monkeys. The men strode hither and thither aimlessly, but with a tremendous air of importance, clucking apprehensively.

The Buli seemed the only member of the community to keep his head. Under his supervision, the village was systematically searched, and the house of the handsome young native found empty. The inference was clear, and the Buli accepted it like a stoic. He pointed out to his blood brother that the disappearance of Falisi was of no particular importance. There were others in Sonomo equally fair. But his philosophy was wasted. To Gerald Hetherington, the incident was nothing short of a tragedy; and, what was even more important, it made him look ridiculous. He shut himself in his palatial residence with a tanoa bowl of kava and refused to stir forth.

More than any one, he dreaded to meet the only white witness of his shame, and so John Brend continued to smoke, and presumably ponder on the difficulties of collecting copra, and finally returned to Malina empty-handed.

Meg met him at the veranda steps with anxious eyes.

"There was only one thing to be done," he told her, helping himself to a whisky and sparklet, "and I've done it."

"And you think—— Will it——"

"Heaven knows," said Brend. "We must wait and see."

Meg came near to him, touched his sleeve.

"It was good of you," she said. "Thank you."

Brend looked down on her with his slow, transfiguring smile.

"It wasn't pleasant," he confessed; then turned abruptly away and flung himself into a chair. "Now what about these ten brand-new acres of bananas?"

Brend waited, and saw—Gerald riding slowly down the hill track. He dismounted at the compound gate and came up the shell pathway like a man in a trance.

Then he caught sight of Brend.

"You heard all about it, of course," he said, with a sickly smile.

Brend nodded, and Gerald passed inside.

That evening, at dinner, Meg was in uncommonly high spirits. She initiated her brother into the mysteries of Malina's newly acquired wealth and the improvements that it represented, and, although Gerald showed rather more interest in the former than the latter, he was forced to admit that a stolid South Sea trader, with a leaning toward one's sister, is not without his uses.

The change in Gerald came about simultaneously with the receipt of a letter and a small square parcel, both bearing the Samoan stamp and postmark. Brend saw them beside his plate at breakfast and knew that the worst had happened. He went onto the veranda, wedged himself into a wicker chair, and waited for the storm to burst, thanking Providence that an early-morning ride had taken Meg out of hearing.

He expected a scene. He expected almost anything—from Gerald. But it is doubtful if anything he could have imagined approached the reality.

Through the open doorway of the living room, Brend heard him tear open

the letter. There followed a long pause —so long that Brend began to wonder if he were mistaken. Then came the sudden scrape of a chair pushed back, and Gerald stood in the doorway.

The blind anger of a weak man is sometimes a terrible thing. Already he was atremble with passion. His face was the color of lard. Only his eyes seemed alive, and they were fastened on Brend in a wide-eyed stare of hate. The letter was clutched in his hand, the letter that Brend had dreaded yet expected ever since he had learned that Weslie had followed his runaway sister to Samoa. She, or her husband, had confessed the part Brend had played in their elopement, and Weslie had seen fit to communicate the details to Gerald; that was all.

Gerald waved the crumpled sheet of paper in Brend's face. For the moment, he was incapable of words; then, in a paroxysm, they commenced to babble from his lips:

"You—you did this! Read it!"

Brend took the letter and read. There was nothing to be said. He could hear the other's breath coming in short gasps.

"And you don't deny it. You *can't* deny it, you—you cad! You did it for Margaret. You wormed your way in here and set her against me. You're both in league against me. I'm an outsider in my own home——"

Brend's silence was more provocative than words. He even mechanically took out his pipe. Gerald dashed it from his hand and glared into his face.

"I'll settle with you both!" he jerked out. "D'you hear? I'll settle with you!"

Unable to contain himself longer, he hit out a frenzied, ineffectual blow. Brend steeled himself to receive it. Even Gerald was momentarily impressed. He looked at what he had done, saw the first man he had ever dared to strike sitting quite still with a thin trickle of blood coursing down his cheek, and turned on his heel.

When he had gone, Brend made a noise of his own denoting relief, and wiped the blood from his face.

As ill luck would have it, Meg returned in the midst of the operation. Her eyes asked countless questions, all of which Brend answered in two words: "Gerald again!" And smiled his slow smile.

"We're out of the frying pan into the fire," he explained. "I rather feared developments, and they've arrived."

The troubled look on Meg's face deepened.

"Where is he now?" she asked.

Brend shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know, but he's going to settle with us, whatever that means. Something unpleasant, I expect; he rather emphasized the point."

Meg looked out over the veranda railing with anxious eyes.

"I'm sorry," she said slowly. "It's horrid for you, horrid!"

"Which is only another way of saying you're sorry I interfered at all," Brend suggested.

She turned on him swiftly.

"How can you think that?" she protested hotly.

"Well, as long as *you* don't, that's all that matters to me," said Brend, and stood beside her at the railing. "Come!" he bantered. "We'll face Gerald's wrath together."

But, although he treated the matter lightly in Meg's presence, his own private thoughts were of a very different character. There had been a postscript to Weslie's letter, no doubt overlooked by Gerald in the heat of the moment. "I send you your revenge," it ran, and could refer to nothing else than the small, square parcel on the breakfast table.

That parcel was in Brend's mind almost constantly during the days that

followed, but he never came any nearer guessing its contents.

Neither did Gerald until he opened it and read the instructions set forth in Weslie's uncertain hand. Then the immensity of the thing almost took his breath away.

He opened it behind the locked door of his bedroom in a trader's ramshackle bungalow along the beach. He sat staring down at the contents with fascinated gaze, thinking, gloating. He knew that if he were caught in his present company, and his purpose known, he would be lynched—and deserve it. He knew that in his hands lay the destruction not only of Malina, but of every coconut estate on the island. Yet he did not hesitate. His was not the hate of a normal being. It consumed him, body and soul. His teeth still clenched, his eyes blazed at the mere thought of Brend.

And so he took the box to Malina by night, and opened it at the foot of a palm.

It was some months later that a man, perspiring and disheveled, drew rein at the compound gate of Malina and hurried up the shell pathway to the house.

Meg recognized him as the owner of an estate along the coast. His manner was strange. Without waiting to introduce himself, he asked her to follow him, and she obeyed. There was something compelling in his silence. He led her down to the coconut groves, and, stooping at the first palm he came to, drew his sheath knife. He worked rapidly and in silence for perhaps a minute, slashing away the outer bark of the tree and laying bare the white, pithy stem within. It was riddled with holes, and in and out of the holes wriggled countless worms.

"You've got 'em," he muttered, more to himself than to Meg. "You've got 'em, all right."

He gave a queer cackle of laughter, and tilted his solar topee onto the back of his head. Then he turned to find Meg's wondering eyes fastened upon him.

"You must excuse me, Miss Hetherington," he apologized, "but I'm done up—been in the saddle or the launch since nine o'clock yesterday." He looked at the girl pityingly. "I'm sorry to have to tell you—but you may as well know first as last—you've got Rhinoceros Beetle like the rest of us."

"Rhinoceros Beetle?" Meg echoed the meaningless words with a perplexed frown.

"I see you know nothing about them," the other went on, in a weary, toneless voice. "You would if you'd ever lived in Samoa. It means that we're down and out, Miss Hetherington. You can't fight Rhinoceros Beetle. It's worse than hurricanes. It's the deadliest pest ever sent to try a planter in these cursed islands. It spreads like a cancer; but quicker, much quicker. The whole island's riddled with it."

"But surely—surely something can be done."

Again the planter gave his mirthless cackle.

"Done?" he said. "Done? Do you know what they did about it in Samoa—what they're bound to do wherever it crops up? The government makes you chop every coconut palm to the ground and burn the rubbish—the labor of ten years or more. In Samoa, the planters barricaded themselves in and held the government off with rifles—for a while. But it made no difference in the end; down the trees came, and burned they were."

"But how——"

"Ah!" The planter commenced kicking at the earth with the toe of his riding boot. "I suppose you'll have to know that, too, sooner or later. The Rhinoceros Beetle doesn't swim across a thousand miles of ocean, Miss Heth-

erington. It was sent by one man to another."

"Sent?" Meg echoed the word in a whisper.

"Yes, and the man who sent has given away the man who received. We're after that man, and Heaven help him when we get him!"

Meg leaned against the palm trunk for support. The truth had come upon her in a flash, searing her like a flame.

The planter regarded her pityingly.

"I'm mighty sorry for you, Miss Hetherington." Then his eyes blazed suddenly, his voice rose to a harsher key. "But may your brother——"

He succeeded in checking the last words on his lips and walked out into the sunshine.

Still leaning against the palm, Meg watched him mount and canter off down the beach road.

Brend was hauling on the mainsheet when the little posse of planters, traders, and "boys" hailed him from the beach.

He pretended that the creaking of the blocks drowned their voices, and the *Margaret* was under way when they reached the end of the landing.

"Hi!" called the foremost. "Where are you going?"

"Going?" Brend looked back over the tiller. "Where should I be going but away from this infernal island? I've got to make some money."

"You're hit, too, eh?"

"I put all I had into Malina."

The man on the landing whistled.

"And you don't want to get him?"

"When you've got him, let me know, that's all," said Brend.

"You take it darned calmly." There was a hint of suspicion in the voice.

"What's the good of taking it any other way?" said Brend, with a corner of his eye on the bellying mainsail and his ear attuned to the welcome ripple of water past the *Margaret's* gunwale. "It's all over, bar the shouting, and I'll leave you to do that."

There rose an indistinct murmur of voices on the landing, but they grew rapidly fainter as the cutter heeled to the breeze, and finally died away. Brend looked again over the ship's wake, and saw the little band of man hunters clustered at the end of the wharf. One of them was signaling him frantically to return.

He continued to look steadfastly ahead until the *Margaret* had settled down to her five knots; then he lashed the tiller and went below.

"You can thank Heaven for a southeast 'trade,'" he said, and, taking a whisky bottle from the locker, placed it on the table.

A huddled figure at the far end of the cabin stirred and sat up.

"Take a drink of this," said Brend; "you need it."

Gerald Hetherington sidled his way to the table, and raised the glass to his lips with trembling hand. His face was scratched and bleeding; his clothes torn to shreds. It was the only way Brend could get him from Sonomo, where he knew he would find him, to the coast in the record time of two hours. Brend hardly liked to recall what he had done to Gerald Hetherington to get him over the ground, but here he was—for as long as it took the *Margaret* to reach Suva.

Again Brend thanked Providence for a southeast "trade."

Gerald gasped after the neat spirit, and leaned back on the locker. The furtive, terror-stricken look faded slowly from his eyes, and he crawled to the companion.

Brend was sitting at the tiller, bathed in sunshine, the wind blowing through his hair. Curiously enough, it struck Gerald at that moment, and for the first time, that there was a difference between this South Sea trader and himself, a difference to the other's advan-

tage. It was a strange, almost startling, thought for Gerald. It caused him to examine his almond-shaped finger nails and moisten his lips.

"We've diddled them, Brend," he snickered. "Pretty neat, eh?"

There was no answer. Possibly the wind had drowned his voice. He cleared his throat and tried again.

"Look here, Brend." His voice took on a conciliatory tone. "You did me a great wrong, there's no getting over that. But you did it for Margaret, and —er—you've seen me through like a Trojan. I—er——"

Brend methodically lashed the tiller and went below.

"Do you know," he said, in his good-natured drawl, and without a vestige of anger, "do you know, it's all I can do to stand being on the same ship with you? It may be your fault and it may be mine, but there it is. Just don't talk, that's all."

Gerald stared at him, wide-eyed.

"Oh, I say——" he began.

"D'you hear?" Brend snapped. "Don't make me angry, or something may happen that both you and I will regret. Lie down there and sleep or read—do what you like, but *don't talk.*"

Gerald obeyed.

At Suva, Brend bought him a steerage ticket for Sydney, and saw the steamer leave. Then he returned to Malina.

He found Meg sitting on the veranda, staring out over the sea of palm tops that had once been green; already they had turned an unhealthy brown.

Brend sat beside her in silence.

"He's sailed for Sydney," he said presently. "It's the best place for him."

Meg turned, and their eyes met.

"Why have you come back?" she asked quietly.

"For you," said Brend.

She looked at him incredulously.

"What else?" he asked, with his slow smile. "This may be a tragedy for others"—he waved his hand toward the palm groves—"but for me it's the greatest stroke of luck that ever happened. We're penniless."

Meg still regarded him wonderingly.

"I've caught up," he explained.

Then the wonderful light came into her eyes.

"Is that—is that what you've been waiting for?"

He took her gently into his arms.

"I'm so tired," she murmured.

"Rest," said Brend.

TRACING A RELATIVE

ONE afternoon Representative Bob Hill, of Illinois, walked over to Representative Charlie Carter, of Oklahoma, on the floor of the House of Representatives, and remarked:

"Charlie, I had a close relative who left home a number of years ago, and I believe he finally settled in Oklahoma. I've often wondered whether he ever turned out to be worth anything."

"What was his name?" inquired Carter.

Hill told him.

"Why, yes," answered Carter. "He lives in my town, and owns some of the largest buildings in the place. He's one of the richest men there."

"Is that so?" commented Hill. "That's the biggest surprise I've had in all my life."

"I'll tell you something else, Hill," pursued Carter. "I married his daughter."

Jinny—Dangerous

By Ernest Thompson Seton

Author of "Wild Animals I Have Known," "Wild Animals at Home," Etc.

A big little story by the foremost animal writer in the world. The story of a monkey who arrived at Wardman's Menagerie in a cage labeled "Dangerous" and who turned out to be a bigger attraction than the lions or the elephants; a monkey that was almost human.

THE cage that arrived at Wardman's Menagerie was heavily bound with iron, and labeled *"Dangerous,"* and when John Bonamy, the head keeper, came up close to peep in, a hoarse "koff, koff," and a shock against the bars warned him that the label was amply justified.

And through the grating, John's practiced eye made out the dark visage of a Hanuman or Langur monkey, the largest and strongest of the kinds that come from India; a female, but standing over three feet high, and of bulk enough to be a dangerous antagonist, even to a man.

The other keepers gathered around, and the monkey worked herself up into a storm of rage, leaping against the bars whenever one of the men came near enough to seem reachable. A scraper, put in to clean up a little, was at once seized in her paws and mangled with her teeth. Keefe, of the monkey house, felt called on to take charge of things, and was peering in, when suddenly a long, thin, hairy arm shot out, snatched off the goggles he was wearing, scratching his face at the same time, and put him in an awful temper, which the merriment of the other men did nothing to allay.

The head keeper had gone elsewhere, after giving instructions, but the noise and fuss brought him back. His practiced ear detected signs of a familiar happening.

"You've got to remember they're human," he said, as he sent all the other keepers away and sat down beside that crazy monkey to talk to her.

"Jinny," said he, giving her the first she name that came handy. "Now, Jinny, you and I have to be friends, and we will be, as soon as we get better acquainted." So he kept on talking soothingly, not moving hand or foot, but softly cooing to her.

She was very ugly at first; but, responding to the potent mystery called personality, she gradually calmed down a little. She ceased snorting, and sat crouching in the filth in the back of the box, glowering with restrained ferocity, nervously clasping one skinny paw with the other. Bonamy did not mean to move for some time, but the wind lifted his hat, and, as his hand flew up to seize it, the monkey flinched, blinked, and again broke out in her sounds of animal hate.

"Oh, ho!" said he. "Some one has been beating you!" Now he noticed the scars and certain slight wounds on

her body. He remembered that she had crossed in a sailing vesel, and a measure of all that meant came to him. He could imagine the misery of that long, long voyage, the fearful, ceaseless rolling, the terrible seasickness that so many monkeys suffer from, the shameful cruelty that he more than suspected, the bad food, and last, the cramped and filthy cage before him. It was easy to guess the fact—the monkey had had a horrible experience with men.

Bonamy was a born animal man. He loved his work among them. He could handle, and ultimately tame, the most dangerous; and the more difficult they seemed, the more he enjoyed the task of winning them over. He could have controlled that monkey in a day, but he had other things to attend to, so merely instructed the monkey keeper to cover the filthy traveling coop with canvas and carry it over to the hospital, where, inside the big cage, it was partly opened; and at nearly every rap of the hammer the Langur gave a savage snort. Then, from a safe place outside, a keeper pulled open the coop door.

Some animals would have dashed out at once, but Jinny did not. She crouched back, glaring defiantly from under her bushy, moving brows, and seemed less inclined to come out now than when the coop was tight nailed up.

Bonamy left her alone. He knew that it doesn't do to hurry them. You can't be polite in a hurry, Lord Chesterfield says, and you must be polite to win your animals. And the story that he read in her wounds showed that the human species had a black past to live down in Jinny's estimation.

She did not leave the coop all day, but that evening, after sundown, he peeped in, and saw her in the big cage, washing her face and hands at the trough. Probably it was her first chance to be clean since she left India. No doubt, she had drunk what she needed, and now she glanced nervously about the place. The food supplied she sniffed at, but did not touch; she walked gingerly around the ironwork, rubbed her finger on some fresh tar just outside the bars, smelled her finger, came back and drank more water, caught a flea on her thigh, then resumed her inspection of the bars. But she did not touch the food. Like ourselves, monkeys don't want to eat when they are all upset; they want a drink of water and quiet.

Next day, she was perched up high, so the keeper put in his long hook to draw out the traveling coop. She sprang at him and raged against the bars. He tried to drive her back by prodding with the hook, but that only made her worse.

Bonamy had often warned his men against getting into a fight with the animals. "It does no good, and only spoils our show." So Keefe came to him, grumbling he "couldn't do nothing with that crazy monkey." As soon as the two men entered the building, Jinny sprang toward them, mad with rage; then Bonamy knew that Keefe had done more than he had owned up to. He sent him away, and, standing very still, began to talk to the monkey. "Now, Jinny," says he, "aren't you ashamed of yourself? Here we want to be your good friends, and help you, and this is how you go on." It took fully ten minutes of that gentle talking and that strong, kind personality before the monk would listen to reason, and get calm. She climbed up to the high shelf, and sat there scowling, lifting her eyebrows and watching this big man, so different from the others she had met.

Realizing that the keeper had in some way incurred the monkey's hate, he set about removing the dirty coop, and managed it after one or two little scenes, each one less violent than the last.

He soon found that it would not do

to let Keefe tend her—the sight of that man was enough to set her crazy—so, just because it was a difficult job, he undertook it himself.

After a week in quarantine, Jinny was wonderfully improved, her fur was clean, her scratches healing, and she seemed less in terror of every approaching sound. Bonamy now decided that she was fit for the big show cage. There was a small trap cage on the highest point of her quarters, and, watching till she was in that, they pulled the string, then transferred the little cage and its inmate to the big outdoor place, with over a dozen of other monkeys.

Of course, she raged at the men during the removal. But they got her safely placed, and knew she would be quite a drawing card, for the public does love a noisy, fighting animal.

As soon as she began to feel a little at home, she charged at the other monkeys, sending them helter-skelter, and chattering, to their highest perches, while she walked up and down, puffing out little snorts, raising and dropping her bushy eyebrows, and glaring defiantly at all the men outside.

The regular keeper went to feed her, and, as usual, went inside, in spite of her angry threats. As soon as his back was turned, she jumped, and got him by the leg. He was badly bitten, and she was hurt, before she was driven off. But we knew now that it was no bluff; she was a "bad monkey."

There seems to be a fascination about a thoroughly proved villain, and Jinny was so bad that she was interesting; and, yielding to the impulse, the big man with the strong hands and the soft heart settled down to his self-appointed task of bringing her to time.

When he went to feed her, she leaped up on a high perch, snorting, glaring, making faces, jumping up and down on all fours, daring him to enter. He wasn't looking for trouble, so he didn't go in; but he was observing her keenly. One thing was sure—Jinny was no coward, and that was a great thing. A brave animal is far easier to tame than a coward, as every zoo man knows.

He fed and watered the monkeys in that cage as well as he could from the outside, to avoid stirring her up, but she kept drifting around to the side of the cage where he happened to be, uttering a low, menacing sound, scratching her ribs with her little finger, jumping up and down, and occasionally dashing at the bars. She bullied all the other monkeys in the cage, too, but the man noticed that she had not really harmed any of them, even when she had good opportunity.

One morning, before the public was in, he was witness of an unusual affair. There was one very little monkey that was terribly afraid of Jinny, and he usually kept one eye on her. But now he was at the front corner of the bars, wholly absorbed in an attempt to steal a banana from the next cage. He was so busy that for a moment or two he did not look around. Meantime, Jinny had sneaked up softly, and now stood over him with her hands raised about six inches above his back. The little chap worked away unconsciously, barely reaching the banana with one finger, which he would bore into the fruit, then bring back to suck with gusto. At length, turning to look behind, he found he was trapped by his enemy.

In a moment, he was a picture of abject terror. He crouched, screaming, in the corner of the cage, and Jinny, to the joy and surprise of the head keeper, stood quite still, raised her hands a little higher, looked amused, he thought, and—let her victim go.

"Well," said he, "that settles it. I know she is not a coward, and she is not cruel. She's *not* a bad monkey at all. She's been abused, but she is all right, and I am going to handle her before a month."

Then he began his old proven

method: never scare her, move gently, go as often as he could, and always talk to her softly. At first, when he came, she would rush threateningly at the bars; then, finding that barren of all interesting results, she gave that up in about a week. But she would sit up high on some perch and glare at him, scratching her ribs, puffing, and working her eyebrows. He used to joke her about it, as he phrased it, and in a fortnight could see he was winning the fight.

All this time there had been no thorough cleaning of the cage, only a long-scraper clean-out, so one morning he said: "I'll go in and scrub up." The boss warned him not to go. "That's a dangerous monk," said he. "If she gets you by the neck, you're done!"

But in he went. Jinny jumped up to her high perch and began snorting, jumping, and scratching her ribs, as usual. He kept one eye on her, and talked to her all the time he was in, and nothing happened; but the boss warned him again: "You look out, or she'll get you yet. I'll not be responsible if you go in there again."

It was only a question of time and patience now, and Bonamy knew the business. Many visits, unvaried gentleness, soft talkings, and little gifts of favorite food at each visit, and gradually resentment gave way to tolerance, tolerance to interest—to attraction.

Thus she had learned to look for his visits, and, before the month was up, Jinny and he became pretty good friends. His judgment of her was right—she had a fine character, was unusually intelligent, and only needed the chance he gave her. In her worst rampaging, she had never hurt any of the little monkeys. She never seemed savage at women or children. She resented only the men. But now she was becoming quite tame even with them, except that she always hated Keefe, and the sight of a sailorman roused her to fury.

But her friendship for Bonamy grew daily. She would come running to meet him, and, if he passed the cage without noticing her, she would jump up and down on all fours, scratching her ribs with her little finger, and giving a peevish "Errr-errr." She was in good health now, and mentally as keen as a brier. She had more sense, the keeper used to say, than some humans he could name.

With her renewal of life and strength, and the total elimination of perpetual terror and sense of cruelty, she developed a most lively disposition. She was full of tricks that were partly due to her active brain and partly her physical energy. And, strange to say, she also showed that at bottom hers was a most affectionate nature. As Bonamy said, she turned out to be the most lovable monkey he ever knew. She was worth more than a lion to draw the public. She could take the crowd away from the elephant and keep them, too, and seemed to take pride in it.

Three months had barely gone since Jinny came, and, though not an important animal, judged by the catalogue of dealers, there is little doubt that she was the head keeper's favorite. It was not wholly because of his own triumph in converting her from an outlaw into the "most lovable monkey he ever knew," but because, back of her bright, dark eyes, there really seemed to be a personality almost human, keenly alert and deeply affectionate, and Bonamy's morning walk to the office took him invariably, now, first to call on Jinny.

One morning, he was late in arriving. There was a crowd of visitors around the cage as he went by. Every few minutes, a small outburst of applause or laughter showed that some of the animals there were making hits with the audience, and he was not surprised to catch a glimpse of Jinny busy at her usual antics. He had, indeed, guessed that it was her crowd, for she had more

tricks than all the rest put together. "One of the best things in the zoo," the boss had begun to call her. Her peculiar specialty was to stand on her head, near the front bars, catch hold high up with her hind feet, then swing herself up bodily, sidewise, till her front feet had hold far above her hind ones; then repeat the movement till she had rolled herself all the way to the top, reversing the loops to climb down again.

In spite of printed warnings, some woman passed under the barrier and reached forward to pull the tail of another monkey who was crouched back to the public, and came so near that Jinny snatched her hat off, and, putting it on her own head, continued to perform, and drew still louder rounds of applause from the crowd.

Every one but the owner of the lost bonnet was convulsed with joy as she dissected it, bit by bit, and spat out the pieces that she tore from the trimming. Then, responding to the tenth encore, she began her back somersaults up the bars. Just as she was drawing herself up, with her breast tight against the bars, a coarse, but foppish-looking man, yielding to some incomprehensible, diabolic impulse, reached out a long sword cane and stabbed the monkey in the groin. With a scream of pain, she fell to the ground, and at once the scene was changed. A wave of fear and dismay set all the lesser monkeys chattering to the high perches. The men onlookers were shocked, and were loud in their cries of "Shame!" while those behind were struggling to find out what had happened.

Why do men do these cruel things? That horrible beast had actually stabbed that poor monkey for the mere pleasure of inflicting pain.

After the first scream, Jinny had fallen; then she dragged herself to the far end of the cage, where she sat moaning, with her hands on the wound. The crowd had recoiled, but now gathered again. Voices shouted: "Where's the keeper?" "Send for a policeman!" "That brute should be arrested!"

The head keeper was aroused by the noise. He went quickly, sensing mischief. "What's up?" he shouted, and a number of answers were volunteered. "Jinny's hurt!" was the only clear one; and then a small boy: "I seen him do it! It was that there big feller. He stabbed her with a sword cane!"

But the big fellow had disappeared.

Jinny was moaning in the back of the cage. The regular keeper had tried to help, but she was too savage to let him come near. As Bonamy hurried to the door, the boss arrived, and protested: "Now, I advise you not to go in. She's dangerous. You know what her temper is!" Yes, Bonamy knew, better than any of them; but he entered.

There, in the far corner, was Jinny, holding her hand on the wounded side, moaning a little, and glaring defiance at all, much as she used to do in the early days. She snorted savagely as he came near, but he stooped down and talked to her: "Now, Jinny! Now, Jinny! I want to help you. Don't you know me, Jinny?"

At length he prevailed so far that she allowed him to lift her hands and examine the wound—not big, but deep and painful. He washed it with antiseptic, and put on a sticking plaster. She moaned while he worked, then seemed quiet. When he left, she called him back in monkey fashion, a whining "errr, errr," but he was obliged to go to his office.

Next morning, she was no better and had pulled off the sticking plaster. He scolded her. "You bad Jinny!" he repeated. She hid her eyes behind her arm and allowed him to put on another sticker; but she began to pull that off as soon as his back was turned and again was scolded till she seemed ashamed or afraid. Still it was off when next he went to her cage.

Twice a day he went to see her now, and she kept on just the same, sitting moaning in the back of the cage, with her hand on the place. She always brightened up when he came in, and gave that little whining "errr, errr" when he touched her. Her wound did not heal, though, and it looked swollen, raw, and angry, and each day she was more upset when he left her. Then it got to be too much of a scene; she clung to him, and kept moaning, and in monkey fashion begging him to stay. But she wouldn't let any one else come near, and he didn't know how to fit it in with his other work. So one day he took the short cut. The boss said he was "crazy," but he did it. He took that monkey up in his arms, and she hung around his neck like a child as he carried her to his office. She sat up in a chair, and seemed quite bright, holding to the shawl he muffled around her, and watching him all the time at his desk. Once in a while she would moan out that whining "errr, errr." Then he would reach out his hand and stroke her head. This pleased her, and she would give one or two little petted grunts and settle down.

But he had an upset scene to fear every time he had to leave the office on business. It made him feel so guilty that he left out all the outside work he could. It was very awkward, but he could see now that Jinny wouldn't last long, and he had got so fond of her that he would spare no pains to please her.

Mealtimes were making three breaks a day, which meant three upsets, so he had his food sent to him on a tray.

In a few days, it was clear that Jinny was dying. She couldn't sit up now, her bright eyes no longer watched the clock that seemed alive, nor brightened when he spoke to her. So he swung a little hammock near his desk. In that she would lie and watch him, with her trustful look on her face, and call him when he seemed to forget her presence. Then he would give the hammock a little swing that pleased her. He had to keep the books. She didn't like to see him doing that; it kept him from looking at her. So he used to lay one hand on her head as he worked with the other. She would hold one of her hands on her wound and hold tight onto his with the other.

One night he had given her the little soup she would take, and had tucked her in her hammock as usual, and was about to leave; but she moaned, and seemed to feel terribly about being left. She uttered over and over that soft "errr, errr," so that he finally sent for some blankets, and made up his mind to stay with her. But he didn't have a chance to sleep. About nine o'clock she was feebly holding one of his hands in her own, and he was trying to check up some accounts with the other, when she began calling in her whining voice, but very softly now, for she was very weak.

He spoke to her, and she had his hand, but that wasn't enough. She wanted something else. So he bent over her, saying, "What is it Jinny?" and stroked her gently. She took both his hands in hers, clutched them to her breast with convulsive strength, shivered all over, then lay limp and still, and he knew that Jinny was dead.

He was a big, strong man. Men called him "rough," but the tears streamed down his face as he told me the story, and added: "I buried her in the little corner lot that we keep for the 'real pets,' and on the trunk of the tree alongside I nailed a smooth teak board for a memorial tablet, and on it wrote, 'Jinny, the best monkey I ever knew.' As I finished writing this, I found I had used a part of the cage she came in, and there on the back of it still, in large letters, describing little Jinny, was the label, *'Dangerous.'* "

The Gold Trail

By Henry De Vere Stacpoole

Author of "The Pearl Fishers," "The Buccaneers," Etc.

(*In Four Parts—Part Four*)

CHAPTER XXVI.

"TONS AND TONS OF GOLD."

IT was on board the *Barracuda,* long before they reached the river, that Macquart had decided to seize the treasure, if possible, for himself, and to destroy his companions.

Before starting from Sydney, he had not conceived the idea. His mind had been taken up entirely with the preparations for the expedition, but there had always been a reservation in his mind due to the terms which Screed and the others had exacted from him. Privately he held himself open to swindle them if he could, but without the least idea of how the thing was to be done.

On board the *Barracuda,* his greed, his hatred of Hull, and the possibilities that lay in Jacky inspired the first part of the plot.

His original story, as told to Screed and the others, made no mention of the real position of the sunken *Terschelling* or the cache. Indeed, he had purposely put them on the wrong scent by stating that the cache was on the river bank and the ship sunk in the river. He had determined to keep the real position a secret till he was on the spot, and so be master of the situation till the last possible minute.

The wisdom of this plan of action became apparent to him on board the *Barracuda.* When Hull insulted him and made him work, he restrained his anger not only by his will, but by the thought that, having the whip hand, he would perhaps be able to make the whip felt.

He determined to divulge nothing, to leave the *Barracuda* in the lagoon, and to take his companions right up to the Dyak village. Once there, means might be found to get rid of them, and then with Jacky's help all would be plain sailing. He had made a study of Jacky and found him to be a black negation, a mechanism acting to the strongest will brought to bear on it, and Macquart had no doubt as to the strength of his own will.

The only point against the plan lay in the question of the safety of it. Was it safe for him to return to that village from which he had fled fifteen years ago?

Now Macquart was a very clever man, but even very clever men are subject to delusions. The fifteen years he had spent wandering hither and thither about the world seemed to him fifteen ages. He had learned to forget so many things that he fancied himself forgotten, not knowing or remembering that life in a tiny community is not the same as life in the great cities, and that the village has a memory far longer and more retentive than the memory of a town.

Even so, he was not without vague qualms. But the strong desire to get even with Hull, the mad greed to pos-

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sess everything, and an indefinable antagonism that lay between him and Screed were factors too powerful to be overridden by vague qualms as to personal safety.

Then there was another very curious factor: the desire, or instinct, to return to the place that was fatal to Lant and might be fatal to himself.

It was the homing instinct that carries the murderer to the place of his crime. An attraction begotten of repulsion.

Having made his plan, he stuck to it. Leaving the *Barracuda* in the lagoon, he brought his companions up the river, and though the first sight of Wiart upset his ideas and made him dread the presence of a white witness, he had not been long in that gentleman's company before he recognized in him a helper and a tool absolutely as though Satan had placed Wiart at his disposal.

To gain time, he prepared the faked treasure-digging expedition to the river spit; and then, having made sure that Wiart was fit for the business and ripe for it, all of a sudden he disclosed the whole thing to him.

Nothing could have appealed more to Wiart. As overseer of the rubber business, he received two thousand dollars a year, and the climate was breaking his health. If the villainy failed, it would only mean three dead men in the jungle and a return to the rubber business. If it succeeded, it would mean unlimited money and the delights of civilization in the form of women, wine, raiment, and ease.

Wiart was an unspeculative individual, else perhaps he would not have endured his life up to this so well. He never thought for a moment that this gold for which he was prepared to do anything might be a thing more dangerous to touch than a live dynamo—when Macquart was the object through which he touched it.

Not a bit. With the gleeful acquiescence of a schoolboy enticed to steal apples, he helped to shoulder the infernal scheme—and more, he engaged to put it through.

He knew the forest and its possibilities, and it was his ingenious scheme to make the forest a criminal.

He would not aid in killing. The forest would do all that, by the hands of its child, the great thorn tangle.

Now on its northern side, the Thorn had only one broad way of entrance. Wiart, on his first exploration of the place, had blazed his way; and, quite confident of returning on his trail, had wandered far, coming out on the western side at last by the purest accident. He had made another expedition in search of beetles only a few weeks before the arrival of Macquart and his companions, and he knew that, while the place was safe for himself and whoever he might lead, it was death to any unfortunate led into it without knowledge of the blaze.

Once he had got far enough, and, finding the others some way behind, he had waited till a bend in the path, helped by the trees, hid his actions. Then he had given the word: "Full speed!" We know the rest, as far as it concerns Hull and Houghton and Tillman.

As for Macquart and his two companions, they did not speak till, led by the rubber man, they were free of the maze.

It had been debated between them as to whether Jacky was to be taken into their confidence by word of mouth. Wiart was for telling him the whole thing and making him an accomplice, but Macquart refused. "If we can get rid of them as easy as you say, where's the use of telling the nigger?" said he. "He won't know whether they've stayed behind from choice or got left, and he has no brains to guess with, I reckon; if any explaining is to be done, we'd better leave it till we are at sea."

Wiart had agreed; and now, clear of the maze, with Jacky following them, they struck west, led by Wiart. Wiart was very much more than a drunkard. Half English, half Dutch, his father had been a botanist employed by the Dutch government in forest work in Borneo. Wiart had been born with the instinct of the forest in his blood. He could not lose himself, especially in these forests that he knew so well. He was following, now, a line of demarcation between a vast grove of dammar trees and a mixed wilderness of camphor, cutch, and teak, and now he was skirting a huge, boggy patch where rubber trees and nipa palms grew in profusion.

"You are certain we are going right?" said Macquart.

"Sure," replied Wiart. "I could tell my way by the smell, but don't waste time in talking, for I want to reach more open ground before dark. Where we're heading, there is a big tract of very open ground leading within a mile of the river, where the trees close up again. You remember, we came through it this morning—but perhaps you did not notice. Men don't in forests; but to me a thinning of the trees that would not be very noticeable to ordinary folk is as sure an indication as a street would be."

"Go ahead," said Macquart.

At sundown, they paused to rest and partake of some food.

"Well," said Macquart, as he ate, "we have got our arms free at last; it's all plain before us now, unless those chaps work their way out of that booby trap; if they do, and if they catch up with us—well, they've got the guns."

Wiart said nothing for a moment; he was busy eating. Then he said:

"You needn't worry. Leave that to them. They'll have enough of it before they are done. Besides, if they did manage to get out, what are they to say? Is it our fault that they lost themselves?"

"I tell you this," said Macquart: "That chap Hull wouldn't stop to ask whose fault it was. There wouldn't be the least little bit of good in putting up a defense. He'd shoot, and shoot on sight. I know him. There wouldn't be any use saying to him: 'It's not our fault,' or trying to make excuses."

"Well," said Wiart, "when he gets out of that place, he's at liberty to do as he chooses, as far as I'm concerned. I'm not afraid."

They resumed their way, now beneath the starlight and the glow of the rising moon.

A little before midnight, they reached the river, and, skirting the village, they came down to the landing stage. Here, Macquart, having fetched the pick and shovel from the tent, waited while Wiart went to the house to collect what money he had there and to get his rifle.

By the stage was moored the boat, and near the boat a canoe. It was Saji's.

"We're in luck," said Macquart. "I was fearing that the boat might have been taken off by some one, or gone adrift. It's just the sort of thing that might happen to spoil everything—but it hasn't."

"If by any chance they get out of that place," said Wiart, "they might follow us in that canoe—there's just room for three in it."

"Leave that to me," said Macquart.

He went to the canoe and untied the grass-rope painter that held it to the stage; then, bringing the canoe up, he followed his companions into the boat, and they pushed off.

Canoe and boat floated out into the current; and Macquart, who had shipped the stern oar while Wiart took the bow, did not perceive a dark form half start from the bushes of the landing stage and then take cover again.

Macquart, by his seizure of the canoe, had won the second move in this game he was playing against fate. But he did not know it. He was quite unaware of the fact that he had been recognized by the woman who had been waiting fifteen years for his return, or that he had been followed by Saji. He recognized nothing, and cared for nothing now, but the fact that his object was nearly accomplished.

Half a mile down the river, he stopped rowing, and, ordering Jacky, who was in the stern sheets, to haul the canoe up by its towrope, he scuttled it, capsizing it with the help of the outrigger.

It sank like a bottle, and the boat resumed its way.

The river, vaguely decked with mist, lay under the moon, making a fairylike picture as it flowed by the chanting, moon-stricken forests. Great bats passed them, fouling the air; and the splash of a jumping fish now and then cast rings across the water. Now and then a great white, feathery moth circled around them like a fragment of mist and vanished as though dissolved.

With the oars and the current, they were making five knots; so that, allowing for rests on the way, they reached the lagoon opening in less than two hours. The *Barracuda* was lying just as she had been left, berthed by the trees on the banks. A horde of little monkeys were camped on board her, but they had done no harm, and, at sight of the approaching boat, they scuttered away, taking to the tree branches, from where they observed the doings of the newcomers.

Macquart brought the boat alongside, and they scrambled on board, where, on the deck, Wiart collapsed, declaring himself fagged out.

"I must turn in and have a bit of sleep," said he. "I've been at it now since yesterday morning, and I'm not as young as I used to be. There's no use in spoiling the job by overhaste. Those chaps are fixed; even if they escape, they have no boat to follow us with, so where's the use in us killing ourselves?"

"All right," said Macquart. "I'll give you four hours. It'll be near sunrise by then. As for myself, I can't sleep."

They opened the hatch and went below, where Wiart tumbled into a bunk and was soon snoring.

Macquart had lit the swinging lamp, and he sat now under it at the cabin table, smoking.

There was food and drink in plenty to his hand, but he touched neither. He wanted no support or stimulant. He wanted nothing but just to sit and smoke and dream.

He had succeeded. He possessed the *Barracuda* and two hands to help work her. Half a million of money in gold lay only waiting to be shipped, and he had settled the score between himself and Hull.

The hatred of Macquart for Hull was a passion indicative of the man's nature. Hull had never done half as much injury to him as he had done to Hull. The way Hull had manhandled him on board the *Barracuda* would, one might have thought, been sufficient to account for this hatred; as a matter of fact, while strengthening it, it had no connection with its cause.

He hated Hull because the latter had turned up in Sydney just at the moment when he had triumphed over all obstacles. It was the intrusion of his past at the psychological moment when his new future was forming. Hull was the concrete expression of all Macquart's failures, wretchedness, crimes, and general disabilities. He was also, of course, a possible sharer of profits; but the latter fact was less than the former, and the bad soul of Macquart rose against him from its uttermost depths.

This being so, imagine his feelings

when Screed sprang Hull upon him at the moment of starting. Hull, from whom he fancied he had escaped!

Well, he had paid Hull out; he had disposed of Tillman and Houghton; there remained only Screed—Screed, waiting quietly at Sydney to gobble half the profits of the expedition.

He determined in his own mind that this should not be. Screed, in his cleverness, imagined that he had a tight hold on the expedition, for the simple reason that to dispose of the findings without risk of exciting suspicion and inquiry a "fence" was needed—a rich and well-to-do business man with business connections and a banking account. But Screed had never dreamed of Wiart. Wiart, despite his drinking habits and his position as a factor, had large connections in the Dutch settlements, and a dark scheme was now evolving in the mind of Macquart by which these connections might be exploited without Wiart having a finger in the pie. A drunkard can never be trusted. Wiart would have to go; but he might be made very good use of before he was extinguished.

Jacky would have to go at the last, when he had done his work. The gold was imperative in its terrible demands. No witness must be left of the whole of this business.

So deep in thought was Macquart that he did not notice the passing of time. It might be said that he slept a sleep that was full of dreams.

Rousing from it, he stood up and stretched himself. Then he turned and looked at Wiart, who was lying in the bunk, breathing heavily, with his mouth half open.

Macquart smiled as he looked at the helpless figure before him; then he turned and lit the stove to make some coffee, and when that was done he set out some biscuits and canned meat. He let Wiart sleep till the last moment possible. Then he awakened him.

Wiart roused himself up, yawned, and looked about him. He did not recognize his whereabouts for a moment. Then, when he came fully to his senses, he put his leg over the bunk edge.

"I was dreaming that I was tangled up in that thorn scrub," said he; "couldn't get my bearings noways." He rubbed his eyes, got onto the floor, and came to the table. "Where's the black fellow?" he asked.

"Jacky? Up on deck. He'll be cooking himself some breakfast in the galley. I made this coffee over the methylated stove so as not to be bothered with him."

Wiart drank his coffee.

"And now," said he, "I suppose there's nothing to do but go for that location of yours and get the stuff on board."

"Nothing. But we must take the yawl across the lagoon first."

"How's that?"

"Because the stuff is buried on the other side."

"Oh, Lord!" said Wiart. "We'll have to tow her."

"That's about it."

"And why in the nation didn't you anchor on the other side to begin with?"

"For the very good reason that the ship was sunk on the other side, and I didn't want those chaps to see her bones. But they did, all the same. Two of them went cruising about the lagoon in the boat and spotted the burned timbers sunk by the bank over there. I thought for a moment it was all up, but the fools never suspected. They came back with the yarn that they had found a wreck under the water, and they never suspected."

"Fools!" said Wiart. "She was burned, you said?"

"Yes."

"That chap Lant must have been a peach."

"He was."

"And to think that girl Chaya was

his daughter—well, she's a chip of the old block, and I reckon if she had any idea this stuff we're after belonged to the father, and if she knew we were onto it, she'd be after us."

Marquart moved uneasily.

Chaya was the only hint of that past which he still vaguely dreaded. He had seen nothing of her mother, scarcely anything of the Dyaks. Brave enough to go back to the scene of John Lant's undoing, he had not been brave enough to make inquiries or go near the Dyak village.

"Anyhow," said he, "she doesn't know. No one has any idea of the whereabouts of that stuff but myself. Well, if you have finished, let's set to work."

They came on deck, where they found Jacky, who, as Macquart had surmised, was engaged on some food he had cooked for himself in the galley. They waited until he had finished, and then they landed and cast off the hawsers. Then they fixed the warp for towing. This done, they rowed across the lagoon to the opposite bank to find a suitable berth.

The day was strong now in the sky; and when they reached the opposite bank, they could see, vaguely outlined in the water beneath the boat, the bones of the *Terschelling,* like the ghost of a black skeleton.

"She was a big ship," said Wiart, who seemed fascinated by the sight below.

"Fairly big," said Macquart. "There's her stern. Well, we'll bring the yawl over and moor her abaft the stern; that camphor tree marks the position."

They rowed back, took up the warp, and began towing. The *Barracuda* came along easily enough. The difficulty was to bring her to her right position beside the bank. In doing this, they nearly got the boat stranded on the stern part of the wreck of the *Terschelling,* but they managed the job at last, and, as the rays of the sun began to strike strongly through the upper branches of the trees, they had her in position, moored stem and stern.

"Now," said Macquart, "for the digging."

His cheeks showed a flush above the beard, and his eyes were brilliant with excitement. There was a spare mattock on board, and this was brought on shore, also a compass and three mat baskets.

Jacky and Wiart shouldered the pick and the two mattocks; Macquart carried the compass. He took a line leading due south from the stern of the wreck, and led the way straight into the forest. He led them for a hundred yards or so, and then stopped for a moment, glancing about him and seeming to listen. It was as though he were fearful of their being followed or surprised. But there was no sound other than the crying of the parrots, the wind in the trees, and now and then, cutting through the air, the rasping call of a cockatoo.

Macquart led on.

And now the trees began to thin out; and then suddenly the ground rose before them, forming a little hill on which nothing grew except a few trees like the pandanus, but bearing no fruit.

The hill was evidently formed by an uprising of the same strata to which the Pulpit Rock, at the entrance of the river, in some mysterious way, belonged; for from the hilltop broke two rocks, in structure exactly like the Pulpit, though each of them was not more than six or seven feet in height.

They were situated thirty feet or more apart. When Macquart reached the space between these rocks, he sat down on the ground as if exhausted. Wiart, standing by him and glancing around, noticed that the elevation of the hill gave him a view far over the trees to southward, while the trees to northward barred all view of the river.

The ground to the south was, in fact, covered mostly by low-growing mangroves feeding their roots in marshy land and reaching to the coast ridge, where the foliage of other trees barred the view to the sea.

"Well," said Wiart, "how much farther have we to go?"

"We are on the spot," said Macquart. He struck his hand palm downward on the ground as he spoke.

"Good!" said Wiart.

He put his mattock down and took his seat beside Macquart. Jacky stood by, holding the spare mattock and pick and gazing round him, with eyes wrinkled against the sunshine, at the far stretches of mangrove forest over which was hanging a vague blue haze.

Jacky belonged to the primitive order of things. He stood six feet in height, and was exceedingly powerful in make and build. Tillman said that he had the strength of three men, and Tillman scarcely exaggerated his facts when he made this statement. Yet, despite his strength and his height, one did not think of this individual as a man; one thought of him more as a child. For one thing, his mind was primitive almost to childishness; for another, his movements were lithe and supple and rapid as the movements of a boy.

Jacky had shouted at a Salvation Army meeting, had been exhibited, like a vegetable, as a fine specimen of what earnest Christian endeavor could do, working in primitive soil, had broken a man's head during a row in Tallis Street, had saved a boy's life from a shark in Lane Cove, helped in a burglary—anything that came along was good enough for Jacky, and it all depended on circumstance and external pressure as to the manner in which he would act.

Tillman had engaged him for the expedition, and was his real master; but he had never paused to ask himself questions as to what had become of Tillman and the others, or whether they had been betrayed. He took Macquart's lead just as the *Barracuda* took the lead of the towrope, and he stood now gazing about him with no thought of anything except whatever vague thoughts the scene around him inspired.

Macquart, after a moment's rest, rose to his feet and seized the pick.

There was about the whole of this business some touch of the enchantment which hangs around the story of Aladdin alone with the Eastern magician on that desolate plain above the treasure cave.

Wiart felt it as he stood watching Macquart, who, now pale and perspiring, stripped off his coat, and, handling the pick, seemed for a moment paralyzed, vacillating, filled with indecision and, one might almost have fancied, fear.

It seemed impossible now, at the supreme moment, to believe that the treasure was really here. This thing that had haunted him for fifteen years, pursued him about the world, held him away from it by fear and drawn him toward it by desire, had become for him an obsession, almost a religion. It was the embodiment of all his desires, the reverse of the medal struck by a Deity that had condemned him to a life of failure and crime. Here at last was to be glimpsed all that he had missed, all that he had failed to reach, all that he had seen from a distance, all that he had envied.

Macquart was no little man. He might have been a great man but for the fatal flaws in his character. He was fundamentally defective. Drunkenness, vice, laziness—all these may be outgrown, lived down, lived over; all these may be simply functioned diseases of the soul to be cast aside as the soul expands and comes to its own. But the disease of Macquart was a crookedness in the grain and texture of his mind, a want, a blindness to the right and

wrong of things, a negative ferocity that became positive when his desires were checked or excited. His fit of indecision and hesitation did not last many moments before, raising the pick, he set to work.

The ground was hard on the surface, but a few inches below it was soft, sandy soil that promised easy work for the mattocks.

Working methodically, he broke the ground over an area of some ten or fifteen square feet. Then, dropping the pick, he called to Wiart to help, and they set to work at the digging. The point he had chosen was almost exactly midway between the two rocks; and they dug without a word, silently, furiously, making the soil fly to right and left, while Jacky now and then lent a hand, relieving the exhausted Wiart.

After twenty minutes' toil, they paused from pure exhaustion. Then they resumed work again, work the most terrific ever undertaken by man. When the shovel begins to bring up despair, the treasure digger knows exactly the measure of his task, and not before. Macquart, laboring, pale as a corpse, hollow-eyed, and with his mouth gaping, had paused for a moment when Wiart, who had retaken the mattock from Jacky, struck something, lifted his shovel, and then, with a cry, as though he had unearthed some terrible object, cast the contents of the shovel on the ground. He had brought up a spadeful of coins, broken wood, like the wood from which cigar boxes are made, and earth. The golden coins were scarcely tarnished.

Macquart spoke not a word. He was standing with his mattock in his hand, his eyes fixed alternately on the find and on Wiart, who was now kneeling, pointing to the gold and looking up at him.

He did not seem for a moment to comprehend what had happened; and then, all of a sudden, he was on his knees, laughing like a lunatic and delving his hands in the place where the mattock had struck. Fistfuls and fistfuls of gold coins he brought up, holding them out in his wide-open palm for Wiart to look at; while Wiart, with his arm round Macquart's neck, half demented, inarticulate, and crowing like a child, picked up coins and threw them down.

It was a terrible picture of momentary mental overthrow.

A huge bird, passing overhead, trailed its shadow across them; and Macquart, with a cry, cast his arm over the stuff he had been delving with his naked hand and glanced up. He saw the bird, and, as if this incident had brought him back to reason, he sat up, brushed the soil from his hands, and pushed his hair back from his forehead.

"It's half in English coin and nearly half in French," he said. "To think it's here! There's some Dutch coin. It's all packed in boxes—so big." He held his hands a foot and a half apart. "You have broken one of the boxes; look, here's the wood! Pretty rotten, it is. We must be careful how we go. Why, we've already lost hundreds of dollars by your carelessness; look at the way you've flung those sovereigns about!"

He picked up an Australian sovereign, light yellow, like brass; he held it between his finger and thumb as he spoke. He seemed not to be able to let it go. He could not escape from the fascination of the thing or from the idea that he was in possession of a bank where these things lay in thousands, thousands, thousands! As he talked, he rubbed it on his left hand as if wishing to feel its existence with a new set of nerves. Wiart, with swollen face and the dazed look of a man who has been drinking, listened in a careless way and laughed at the other's reproaches.

"We'll pick 'em up," said he.

"Where's the use of bothering? Suppose we lose one or two—will that make us any the poorer? What we've got to do now is to cart the stuff down to the boat. Lucky we brought those baskets."

He rose, and, taking one of the mat baskets, began to collect the coins, sifting them from the earth in which they lay. Macquart helped; while Jacky, squatting on his hams, held the basket wide open.

It took a long time to collect all the loose coins in view; and then Macquart, with his sleeves rolled up, and just as a person breaks up honeycomb, delved with his hand in the remains of the box they had broken open, and extracted by handfuls the last of its contents.

"There are hundreds more boxes," said Macquart, sitting back and wiping his brow; "hundreds and hundreds! We brought them up in sacks, the whole crew working double shifts. Tons and tons of gold! The English stuff is atop, the French and Dutch below."

"Let's go steady now," said Wiart. "No more spade work. We'll dig 'em up with our hands and so avoid breaking them. They're all packed close together, I suppose?"

"Side by side," replied Macquart.

Kneeling opposite to one another, the two men began carefully to remove the earth, till the whole top of the second gold box was uncovered. It seemed solid, though the metal bindings at the corners were black with rust. Working it loose very gently, Macquart got one hand under it for the purpose of lifting it, when the whole thing burst to pieces, and the coins came tumbling out in a jingling cataract.

"Curse it!" said Wiart. "This is going to give us trouble."

It was. Had the boxes not been rotten with age, the transportation of the gold to the lagoon bank would have been a difficult business, but feasible. As it was, the handling and collecting of all this loose stuff was an appalling task, the significance of which was just beginning to loom before them. But it did not daunt them. They set to work, and in less than half an hour they had collected every loose coin, and the two baskets containing the first of the treasure were ready for transportation. Then they found that one basket was more than one man could carry if it were to be brought any distance—that is to say, for a white man. Jacky made no difficulty at all about carrying one, yet even for him it was a maximum load. They settled the difficulty by carrying a basket between them with the help of the pick shaft through the handles, Jacky following with the other. They left Wiart's rifle and ammunition, which they had brought with them, by the cache, and started.

There was no difficulty in finding the way. Before they had covered half the distance, the shimmer of the lagoon led them through the trees; but when they reached the *Barracuda,* they were so exhausted by all they had gone through and by the weight of their load that they sat down for a moment to rest before completing the business.

"This stuff will finish us before we've done with it," said Wiart. "Good Lord! I never did work like this before. Look at me! I'm wringing wet."

"Jacky," said Macquart, "hop on board and fetch us a jug of water; bring a bottle of gin and a glass with you—we've earned a drink."

Jacky, leaving his basket on the bank, climbed over the rail of the *Barracuda,* went to the saloon hatch, paused for a moment to sniff, as if he smelled something for which he could not account. Then he began to go down the companionway. He had not taken four steps down the ladder when he suddenly vanished, as though snatched below, and a scream, heart-rending and appalling, pierced the air. Then came a muffled cry, the sound of a struggle,

and silence. The two men on the bank sprang to their feet and stared at one another in terror.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MONKEYS.

With the sound of the struggle, the *Barracuda* had rocked slightly, sending a ripple out over the smooth surface of the lagoon. She now lay perfectly still.

"It's those chaps that have escaped and got on board her," said Wiart. "They're hiding there and waiting for us."

"Not they!" said Macquart. "It's something else. It's maybe natives." He was white to the lips, and small wonder, for nothing could be more sinister or devilish than the way in which Jacky had vanished, as though the *Barracuda* had snatched him into her maw. Then suddenly Macquart turned to the other.

"Off with you back and fetch the rifle!" said he. "I'll stay here and watch. Quick; there's no time to be lost!"

Wiart turned and started off amid the trees; and Macquart, withdrawing a bit, stood leaning against a tree bole with his eyes fixed on the *Barracuda*. As he stood, waiting and listening, a crash came from the cabin of the yawl. It was the crash of crockeryware upset and broken, and it only wanted that and the dead silence that followed to put a cap on the horror.

Natives would not carry on in this way. If they had seized Jacky and killed him, they would not remain in dead silence.

Minute after minute passed, and then a soft sound from behind him made Macquart turn. It was Wiart with the rifle.

"There's some one on board," said Macquart, in a low voice. "There's just been a big upset in the cabin. One of us has got to board her and have a look down the hatch, while the other stands by, ready to shoot if any one comes up. We've got to see this thing through, and quick."

"Well, I'd rather you went aboard than me," said Wiart. "I'm no coward, but this thing gets me. It's not natural."

"Natural or unnatural, we've got to finish with it," replied the other. "We have no time to waste. There's the gold lying waiting to be taken aboard, and here are we waiting like fools. It's not a pleasant job, but we'll draw lots."

He plucked two blades of grass of unequal length, held them in his closed hand, and held his hand to Wiart.

"Whoever draws the longest goes," said he.

Wiart drew a blade, then they compared the blades. Wiart's was the longest.

He was no coward, yet he held back just for a moment. Then, picking up his courage and handing the rifle to his companion, he walked straight to the yawl, boarded her, and, without a moment's hesitation, came to the open saloon hatch.

He peeped cautiously down, then turned toward Macquart and shook his head to indicate that he saw nothing.

Then, shading his eyes with his hand, he looked down again.

He left the saloon hatchway and came to the skylight. This was closed, however, and could only be opened from below, while the thick glass prevented any view being obtained of the interior.

He was fiddling with the skylight in a stupid sort of attempt to open it when suddenly from the saloon hatch appeared a vast hand that seemed covered by a black woolen glove. It grasped the coaming, and almost immediately, squeezing up through the hatch opening, came the head, shoulders, and chest of an enormous ape.

It was the great monkey of New

Guinea. A creature as large as the gorilla, yet far more human, and, strange to say, more malevolent—at all events, in appearance. The gorilla impresses itself upon the mind of the gazer at once as a monkey, but the great ape of New Guinea takes his frightfulness from the fact that the idea "man" connects itself with the vision of him, not "monkey."

He is like a great ruffian man gone to neglect in the primeval woods, his humanity clinging to him like a shame.

Macquart was so astonished by this apparition that he did not even call out to Wiart, and Wiart, who was still engaged in wrestling with the skylight, did not see the object that had appeared on deck till a faint sound made him turn.

He had picked up a belaying pin to help him in his work, and now, as he stood facing the Horror that had materialized itself at such a short distance from him, his hand, unfortunately for himself, instead of releasing the iron pin, clutched it spasmodically. It is quite possible that the brute might not have touched him. Creeping along by the bank, and finding the *Barracuda,* it had boarded the yawl for the purpose of exploring it. Down below, it had been on the point of coming up when Jacky made his appearance on the saloon ladder. Then, sure that all this was a trap and Jacky the setter of it, the great monkey had seized the intruder by the leg, hauled him down, and finished him. Again it had been on the point of making its escape when the sound of Wiart coming on board had made it pause. Then, hearing the fumbling at the skylight, and seeing a fair way up the companion ladder, up it came, and another moment might have taken it off over the side had not Wiart, in a paroxysm of terror, hurled the belaying pin.

It struck the brute full in the mouth. Then Macquart, who had raised his rifle to his shoulder, but who dared not fire, so tremulous was his hand and so close together the antagonists, saw the monkey seize the man and hold him out with both hands as a furious mother might seize a naughty child. It shook him.

It did not seem to do anything more than that, and then it was gone, and Wiart was lying on the deck hiccuping.

He hiccupped several times, and put his hand to his side as if it pained him. He did not speak or take any notice of Macquart. His mind seemed dulled or far away. Then, all of a sudden, as Macquart boarded the yawl, Wiart turned on his back.

He was dead.

Macquart stood looking from the corpse at his feet to the spot where the monkey had disappeared into the trees.

He did not seem to understand fully for a moment what had happened. In fact, he did not realize fully that Wiart was dead till, kneeling down beside him, he raised his arm and dropped it. Then all at once the truth broke on him. The terrible truth.

He did not care a button for the life of Wiart. The life of Wiart was of no more concern than the buttons on Wiart's coat. What concerned him greatly was the fact that if Jacky were dead below or seriously injured he—Macquart—would be helpless. Even if he could get the *Barracuda* out single-handed, how could he tackle single-handed the transport of the gold? This thought occurred to him, but he did not appreciate the true significance of it yet.

He released Wiart's arm, rose up, and approached the saloon hatchway.

For a moment, he stood listening, then he called down the hatch to Jacky, but received no answer. Down below there was absolute stillness, a silence accentuated by the faint buzzing of flies.

Then Macquart came down. The body of Jacky was lying right across the table with its head overhanging the end opposite to the door. The swinging lamp had been swept away, and a tray of glasses and crockeryware lay smashed on the floor. Otherwise there was little sign of confusion or struggle, but there was in the air a faint, vague odor of wild beast that caught Macquart by the throat and made the soul in him revolt.

Jacky was quite dead.

Macquart opened the skylight by means of the lever, and the fresh air of day came down so that one could breathe.

The immediate problem now before Macquart was the disposal of Jacky's body. It could not be left here. It must be got overboard. He proceeded to the task, and found, after ten minutes' labor, that it was utterly beyond him. With the greatest difficulty, he managed to pull and drag the body to the foot of the companionway, but he could not get it up. After all sorts of fruitless endeavors, he paused to think. He could think of nothing. The only way to bring it up was with a tackle, but that would require not only a man to haul on the purchase, but a man to guide the body. Besides, he had not the means nor the skill. He sat down for a moment on the edge of a bunk. He was thinking, not of the body lying at his feet, but of the gold.

This was the beginning of a nightmare business. Gold! Gold! Gold! Tons of it waiting to be lifted and deported, a dead man lying on the cabin floor of the yawl, another on the deck, and one man with only one pair of hands left to face the task.

Even were he to get the gold aboard, how could he put to sea with that corpse in the cabin? It was very problematical if he could get the *Barracuda* out at all, single-handed as he was, but even if it were possible, how about this dreadful supercargo?

Even if he were to store the gold in the fo'c's'le and tiny hold and close up the cabin hermetically, sealing hatch and skylight, how could he steer for any port? There would at once be an inquiry and an examination of the boat; even if he were to return to Sydney, the port officer who boarded him and who was refused entry to the cabin would very soon have the rights of the matter.

The corpse of Jacky acted on him much as the whaleman's drogue acts upon the harpooned whale. He could not escape from it, and it was bound to ruin him in the end—even if he managed to get the gold on board.

But Macquart's brain just now was not in a condition to recognize clearly or weigh exactly. Having sat for a minute or so on the edge of the bunk, he rose up and came on deck.

Here the first thing he saw was the body of Wiart lying just as he had left it—but—there was a bird circling in the air above it.

In this terrible climate, to be dead and be devoured are synonymous terms.

Macquart stared at the sight before him. Then he tried to get Wiart overboard. It was a most terribly difficult business. Wiart did not seem to want to go in the least; once or twice when he slipped back onto the deck, just as Macquart had almost got him over the rail, his face in the full glare of the sun showed a grin as if he were deriding the efforts of the other. He had the appearance of having just fought with some one, his clothes were in disorder, his collar half off, and his necktie all askew. From a distance, as Macquart recommenced the business of trying to get him over, it looked as though a drunken man were being ejected from the *Barracuda*. This time, Macquart was successful, and the body went over

and floated off on the current that flowed riverward past the yawl.

It was an hour after noon now, and Macquart, who had not eaten since dawn, felt faint from his exertions and from want of food. Leaving aside this feeling, he was afflicted with a slight confusion of thought, or, rather, want of power in coördinating his thoughts.

He went into the galley and found the remains of the food left by Jacky that morning. In the locker on the right-hand side there was plenty more food. Biscuit tins and cans of preserved meat and vegetables, condensed milk, and so forth.

Macquart ate, and, as he ate, his eyes roamed about hither and thither. He read the labels on the meat cans, and the measure of his extraordinary position might have been taken from the feeling of incongruity and strangeness with which these commonplace labels filled his mind.

The place where he was seemed remote from the ordinary world as Sirius.

He could hear a faint chuckle now and then as the lagoon water lapped the planks, and occasionally a faint groan from the rudder. There were all sorts of little facts about the lagoon that spoke in all sorts of little ways only to be distinguished and interpreted by a person who had nothing to do but listen.

Thus, the drift of the current was unequal in rapidity, sometimes a fairly strong swirl would lip the bow and swing the rudder to starboard a few inches, or a log would come along half submerged and rub itself against the planking, or a faint, bubbling sound would tell of a spring blowing off its superfluous water in the lagoon floor.

The lagoon, seemingly so dead and inert, was, in reality, always at work, fetching in driftwood from the river, expelling it again, raising or lowering its level in some mysterious way independent of the sea tide or river flow, stopping up old well heads on its floor, opening new ones, getting rid of all the detritus that a tropical forest hands to the water.

Macquart sat for a while after he had finished eating, listening to these vague and indeterminate voices; then, though the gold was always in his mind, the recollection of the two baskets of treasure left on the bank came to him for the first time.

He left the galley, landed, and seized the basket that Jacky had laid down before going to his death. Then, struggling on board with it, he stood undecided as to what he should do.

It was impossible to store anything in the cabin. He could not go down to that place again. There remained the hold and the fo'c's'le. He had never explored the little hold, but he knew the fo'c's'le; he came to the f'c's'le hatch, paused a moment, and then, just as a person shoots coal into a cellar, he emptied the contents of the bag down it. He had no time to waste stowing this cargo whose horrible proportions in relation to his puny efforts were ever looming before him. It was like being in front of a great golden mountain that had to be removed piece by piece and in pocketfuls. Added to this fantastic labor would come—on its completion—the problem of escape from the lagoon in the *Barracuda* single-handed; added to this the terrible problem of the disposal of Jacky's remains.

No man outside of Nightmare Land was ever confronted with such a position as that which faced Macquart, urged on by gold lust.

In the grasp and under the whip of the gold demon, all the powers of his mind were subservient to the main desire.

He turned now with the empty basket in his hand, regained the shore, and came back with the other full basket, shot the contents down the fo'c's'le

hatch, listened till the jingle of the last rolling coin ceased, and then flushed, breathing hard, and full of new life and energy, started off, with both baskets rolled up under his arm, for the cache.

Here, with one of the mattocks, he cleared the earth carefully away from the next treasure box, and then, working with his hands, began to extract it. Work as carefully as he might, the rotten wood of the box sides broke to pieces and the coins fell about loose; he had no one to hold the basket open, and he spent ten minutes in fruitless attempts to devise some method to keep the thing erect and yawning.

Failing in this, he was condemned to hold it open with his left hand and fill it as best he could with his right.

He succeeded finely in this way as long as the coins were in mass, but when it came to the last few hundred scattered loose, ah! then the real trouble began. Every coin had to be picked up. His taskmaster saw to that. To leave one single golden coin ungathered was a physical impossibility, and it was during the picking up of these that haste kept crying to him "speed," and imagination kept painting the awful labors still before him. Every last coin of all that cache had to be removed, for each of these terrible things had a power as great as the mass. Each was a sovereign or a louis.

Each represented four dollars or five dollars, and five dollars to Macquart, who had always known poverty, five dollars dressed in gold in the form of a sovereign constituted a power against which there was no appeal.

He whimpered as he picked among the soil, whimpered like a woman in distress.

The heat of the day was great, and the sun struck heavy on him, all the time the sweat was pouring from him, and a thirst, tremendous as the thirst of fever, withered his soul.

Then, when the last coin was salved, he took the basket carefully by both handles, rose to his feet, and lifted it.

He had intended to fill both baskets, but he had completely forgotten this intention, and indeed the present load was as much as he could carry—almost more than he could carry.

He had got halfway between the cache and the lagoon bank when one of the handles of the basket broke, the basket swung over, and a torrent of coin fell with a noise like the rush of rain amid the leaves and grass.

A faint jingle told of coin striking coin; then nothing could be heard but the crying of the parrots in the trees and the wind stirring the branches.

Macquart carefully seized the basket by the edge on the side of the broken handle so that no more of the contents could escape, then he placed the basket by a tree trunk and proceeded to hunt for the lost treasure. He seemed quite unmoved by this disaster, but in reality he was stunned. It is not the weight that makes the last straw figure as the last straw; it is the psychological moment. This accident that would have made Macquart swear earlier in the day now made him dumb.

Then, with what seemed a terrible patience, he went down on his knees and began to collect the coins. He stripped away the long leaves as well as he could and the ground vines. Here and there he could see the faint glint of a metal disk, and wherever he saw one he pounced. The light was not very strong, on account of the foliage above, yet it was sufficient for his purpose.

And now, as he labored on hands and knees, rooting about like an animal, movements in the branches above became apparent, and twenty little faces, some upside down, could be seen watching the worker with an earnestness ludicrous, yet somehow horrible.

A monkey is a grin when it is not

a grimace, and nothing can be imagined farther removed from honest mirth than these incarnations of laughter—nothing certainly than these little faces amid the leaves looking down at Macquart.

Then one of them plucked a big, squashy-looking fruit from one of the branches and flung it.

It hit Macquart in the small of the back, and he sprang to his feet with a yell. The blow had been a sharp one, and, coming unexpectedly there, where he fancied himself alone, the shock had badly upset his nerves.

He glanced wildly about him. Then he saw his tormentors, and shook his fist at them.

His outcry had startled them, but they recognized at once that he was unarmed; they knew that he was angry and that they were the cause of his anger, and they knew that he was impotent, and the knowledge of all this filled them with joy.

They pelted him now with little nuts, while, pretending to ignore them, he went on his hands and knees again. As he worked, he placed the recovered coins in the side pocket of his coat. Then, as he worked, something that was not a nut hit him on the brim of the hat which he had pushed back to save his neck—bounced over his shoulder, and struck a broad leaf in front of him. It was a gold coin.

He had made a great mistake in placing the basket by the tree trunk, for there was an air shoot hanging by the tree, and, sliding down the air shoot, one of the monkey folk had captured the basket and its contents, spilling most of them on the way up.

But there was enough left for ammunition, and Macquart, looking up, got a fistful of sovereigns in his face. He turned, saw that the basket was gone, and then, forgetting that he was a man, with the howl of a wolf, began to climb the tree that was nearest to him. As he climbed, he shouted and swore at the creatures skipping above him, and the higher he climbed the higher they went.

Then suddenly the branch he was climbing by broke, and he fell, the next branch caught him, but only for a moment, before it snapped under his weight, delivering him over to the branch immediately below.

He clung to it, swinging by his hands twenty feet above the ground.

The monkeys above, enraptured at this fine game that had been suddenly provided for them, pelted him, but he did not heed.

He did not know how far the ground was beneath him; he felt that he was at an enormous height in the air and that to fall would be sure death. He clung. He tried to work his way along the branch toward the bole. It was impossible; to do so he would have been forced to hang by one hand at a time and that was beyond his strength; besides, the branch had bowed beneath his weight. He knew that he could not go on clinging forever, that the fall must come certain and soon, yet his mind found room for fantastic thoughts. It seemed to him that the forest was in a conspiracy with John Lant against him. Trees, monkeys, leaves, vines, lianas, and birds, all were "setting on" him to rob him of his life; he saw himself swinging there, pelted by monkeys—the picture came to him as though it were the picture of another man. Then cramp seized him, and he fell.

The fall, so far from killing him, did not even break a bone, but he was half stunned, and he sat for a while with his hands to his head, while the world rocked and reeled beneath him, and the monkeys, who had descended limb by limb, pelted him and gibed at him as if to show the boundless and tireless malignity that life can tap through its creatures.

Then, after a while, Macquart rose up. He stood for a moment as if undecided, and then made off back toward the cache. He went, half running, half stumbling, talking and muttering to himself in a crazy sort of way, defeated, beaten, yet still led by the gold that was destroying him. At the edge of the cache, he sat down and began digging with his hands. He had brought the other basket up close beside him, and as he burst another gold box open he began filling the basket, but his half-crazy mind was now so obsessed by the idea of the basket breaking that he did not load it with more than five handfuls of coin and earth, for there was no thought now of sifting the coin from earth or earth from coin, only the overwhelming and overmastering thought of speed.

Then, with a load that a child could have carried, he started off at a trot for the lagoon edge, discharged his burden into the fo'c's'le of the yawl, and returned.

So it went on, and when the sun sank and the stars broke out above, he was still running, whimpering like a child who is late on an errand and fears a beating, heedless of the rushing monkeys that flitted above him like a breeze in the foliage, heedless of everything except the waste labor on which he was engaged—for he was not carrying gold now in his basket, but earth, under the belief that he had to empty the whole world into the fo'c's'le of the *Barracuda*.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE SNARING OF SAJI.

Saji, when he parted from Chaya, after having seen Macquart and his party vanish in the thorn maze, made back for the river at a trot.

It was a nine or ten hours' journey from the river to the thorn for Europeans cumbered with luggage. The return journey took Saji slightly over four hours. The runner who brought the news from Marathon to Athens would have had little chance in a long-distance race against Saji.

Like a centipede, this man seemed to have a hundred pair of legs at his service to be used a pair at a time, so that he might run forever, or at least till all were worn out; his lungs were practically inexhaustible.

It was toward ten o'clock when he reached the Dyak village, and then, under the stars, he met the old woman who was waiting for news.

He told her everything.

"So," said she, "he has led them into the thorn city; that means he will come back—he and the other one; he will lead him to the hiding place or he will destroy him before they get there. Now is your time to strike, but not till you have marked down the hiding place."

Saji nodded.

"Where is Chaya?" asked the woman.

"She is following after," said Saji. "I came swiftly."

The old woman went to the hut where she lived and returned with something in her hand. It was a parang, a Dyak knife in a leather sheath. She held it out to Saji, but he showed her that he was already possessed of one, taking it from his girdle and holding it before her in the starlight.

"Give it to me and take this," said she. "It belonged to Lant; it will know what is to be done and lead you."

Saji took the parang, and placed it in his girdle. Then, with another word or two to the old woman, he started off through the trees. By the river bank, he took up his position among the bushes at a point that gave him a good view of Wiart's house and the landing stage; then he squatted down to wait and watch.

He was watching chiefly by means of his ears. His eyes told him little of what was going on around him beyond the span of river bank where the house stood. His ears told him much. He could hear the river, a sound made up of a thousand little sounds, from the weak voice of the water washing bank and tree roots and landing stage, to the splash of fish jumping in the distance. The smell of the river came with its voice, a smell of damp and decay, mixed with the musky perfume of river mud.

Then, on the other hand, he could hear the voices of the forest swept by the night wind. Hour after hour passed without lessening in the slightest the deadly vigilance of the watcher. He was thinking of Chaya. The success of this hunt would bring him Chaya. When he presented her with the gift of gifts, she would be his. The old woman had said so. Chaya despised him as a monkey slayer; she looked on him as a boy. When he proved himself a man in her eyes, all would be different.

Then of a sudden thought fled from him, and, feeling for the Punan stabbing spear at his side, he bent forward and remained rigid as a drawn bow. They were coming. He watched them as they parted, Wiart going to the house for his gun and Macquart going to the tent. Then they appeared again, coming along down to the landing stage, Macquart leading the way, Jacky and Wiart following.

They were going to take to the boat, and once they were off it would be a simple business to follow them in the canoe.

He watched them arranging the boat; then he saw Macquart going toward the canoe. The boat pushed off and the canoe followed it.

Then Saji, with a wildly bounding heart, saw that he had been tricked. These men whom he despised in his soul had been cleverer than he. Never for a moment had he dreamed that the canoe was in danger; never for a moment had he fancied that their suspicions would have been raised against him. And now he found himself checkmated, rendered impotent, tricked, and put out of the game.

He sprang up among the bushes; then he sank back again. To follow was impossible, to show himself or call out might only lead to a shot from that rifle Wiart could use so well.

He watched the boat vanish round the river bend, then he fell to thinking.

There was not another canoe on the river; all the fishing Dyaks were at sea. The river was no use, so he dismissed it from his mind; the only road he could take was the river bank, and he did not know the road in the least.

He knew the forest, but he had never hunted along the river bank, though his hunts had sometimes brought him out on the riverside. However, want of knowledge of this strip of the forest did not stay him in the least. The river would be his guide, and, picking up his spear, he started.

He did not know in the least where the boat was making for; he only knew that it had gone downstream, and downstream he made his way.

The road was easy at first, but presently it became bad, squashy, and overgrown with mangroves. The mangrove root seems made by nature as a trap for the foot, but Saji seemed to have eyes in his feet, and he did not trip. He passed over this difficult ground as swiftly as through the easy parts of the forest, passed the belt of nipa palms that bordered it, and struck in to the region of cutch and camphor trees that lay beyond, always keeping in view the river on his right.

Beyond the camphor trees came very easy ground. In the old days, when certain animals were more frequently met with in this part of the forest,

they would come down to drink at the river just here, and this fact was to weave itself into the texture of the story of Macquart in a most unexpected manner.

Saji had not made twenty yards across this easy ground when the earth gave under his feet. He made a wild effort to save himself, failed, fell into the darkness, and lay half stunned for a moment and half smothered by the rush of earth and rubble that had followed him.

He had fallen into a pit trap dug in the old days. A bottle-shaped cellar in the earth covered over with laths and clay and growing plants. The laths, made of split bamboo, had decayed long ago, but the fine roots of the plants held the clay together; it had consolidated and hardened, making a cellar top capable of sustaining the weight of a small animal, but not the weight of a man.

In the old days, the bottom of the pit had been dressed with sharp bamboo stakes, point upward. Fortunately for Saji, time had rotted these to dust.

He lay for a moment; then he sat up. He knew at once what had happened to him, and the knowledge restored his faculties like a stimulant. Looking up, he could see the faint light that indicated the ragged opening through which he had fallen. Then he rose to his feet and began exploring his prison with his hands held flat, palms against the walls.

He was not long in discovering the exact shape of the trap, which was that of an inverted funnel. Having obtained this fact, he explored the texture of the walls.

Rain had never come in here, the earth covering, and more especially the leaf covering of the roof, coupled with the fact that the roof formed part of the gentle shelf of the bank to the river, had kept the place dry, and the walls were of hard earth, but not so hard as to be proof against the point of his spear.

He had been carrying it aslant over his shoulder when he fell, and he had not released his hold on it. It was the first thing he touched when recovering his full consciousness.

Having explored the texture of the walls, he turned to the question of the depth of the trap. By standing on tiptoe, he could just touch the foliage on the borders of the hole in the roof with the spear point.

Having obtained all these facts, he crouched down on the floor of his prison to grapple with them.

It was a terrible problem. No less than the problem of escape from the interior of an inverted funnel whose walls were of hard earth.

For a long time he crouched, wrestling with it. Whoever had devised this trap must, in carrying out his plan, have expended no little time and energy. The earth must have been drawn up in basketfuls, the delvers carefully broadening the base at the risk of an infalling of the walls. But the labors of the making of it were nothing to the labors of Saji wrestling with the result.

Unable to hit upon any means in the least feasible, he suddenly rose to his feet. As he did so something touched him on his shoulder. It was the end of a ground liana that had been brought down by the spear head when he had explored the opening with it. The liana hung down like a rope; it was half an inch thick. It was salvation.

Inverting the spear, and pushing the point into the farthest recess of the pit, he managed to seize the butt with his teeth, so as to bring it up with him. Even in the overwhelming joy of finding an easy and rapid means of escape, he did not forget for a moment the necessity of taking the weapon with him.

It was impossible to climb with it in his hands, and even now, holding the extreme end of the butt in his teeth, he had to keep his head bent, with his chin on his chest, as he climbed. This made the process more laborious and more lengthy; it produced all sorts of extra vibrations in the rope of liana; it was his undoing. His uppermost hand had reached within a foot of the opening when the liana broke.

Instantaneously, he must have—so to speak—spat out the spear butt, else it would have been driven through the roof of his mouth. As it was, he found himself lying on the floor of his prison with the spear across him.

He was shaken, but quite unhurt, and the fall, instead of demoralizing him, set him to wrestling again with the problem he had so nearly solved. Saji had fine qualities among his many defects, and the finest of them were patience under defeat, and steadfastness. The sea and the forest had educated these natural qualities inherited from those ancestors of his who had tracked and trapped and fished since the beginning of time, ambushed their enemies after weeks of patient watching, and secured their heads just as Saji hoped to secure the head of Macquart.

That was the gift which would bring him Chaya, and, much as he valued life, that was the object for which he was striving now.

Though he had no enmity against Macquart, the head of Macquart held him to its capture with a grasp stronger than the love of life.

Saji had no enmity toward the animals he followed in the forest or the fish he followed in the sea, yet in the pursuit of fish or beast life was nothing compared to the object of the chase. His busy mind, working now with the activity of a squirrel in a cage, suddenly struck upon a new idea.

He began to attack the walls of his prison. Going down on his knees and with his spear point, he began digging away at the clay as though endeavoring to make the beginnings of a tunnel. Nothing was farther from his thoughts than a tunnel. He was digging to bring down earth.

If he could bring down sufficient to make a pile high enough to allow him to stand on it and grasp the vegetation at the opening, he fancied that he could save himself. Had the pit been flooded with the cold, practical light of day, I doubt if he would have attempted the business.

He worked with the spear point, and then, like a digging animal, with his hands. He worked constantly and methodically. He worked through the remainder of the night, through the dawn, and on into the day. Then he rested for some hours, and recommenced working through the evening. Before night fell, he had brought enough clay out of the pit side to make a mound three feet high in the center. A tremendous amount considering the stiffness of the earth and the fact that the higher the mound was built the broader spread its base. For every inch of altitude he had to broaden and thicken the base of this infernal mound. As a matter of fact, to escape by this way it would be necessary to fill the whole pit with clay. To come up on a rising tide of clay. The thing was impossible. His labor had given him employment which, after liberty, is the best gift a prisoner can receive, but that was all.

Now, with the darkness, he knew that he was lost; that all the digging he could do would not save him, and, knowing that, he sat down to die. Saji had a terrible philosophy of his own. Capable of endless effort, he was yet a fatalist pure and simple when faced with the impossible or the inevitable.

He did not moan to himself or curse his lot. He had to die—well, then, he

had to die and there was no more to be said on the matter. He did not think, as he sat there, of all the pleasant days and good times he would never see again, simply because such things were not for him. Blue skies to Saji were no more than blue skies to an India-rubber figure; sunshine was good because it warmed him and for no other reason. When it warmed him too much it was bad. Freedom was good because it allowed him to move about and kill things. Food was good because it filled his stomach and satisfied his desire for food. He had neither sunshine, freedom, nor food here, but presently he would not need them.

His mind retired into itself, folded up, almost ceased to exercise its functions.

Long after dark—how long he could not possibly tell—Saji, seated in the darkness of his terrible prison, suddenly came to life and sprang erect with a shout.

The sound of voices had come to him. Voices of human beings passing close to the pit mouth.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MACQUART THE MAD.

When Hull and his companions reached the landing stage and found the boat—as they expected—gone, they struck at once downstream, taking the exact path taken by Saji.

You will observe that mechanism which fate often displays in the fact that Macquart, in stealing the boat and so making his own position seemingly more secure, had, in reality, provided a release for the death that was pursuing him in the form of Saji and which was trapped and held up in the pit.

The party, passing along the river bank and hearing the call for help, stopped, made a search, discovered the trap mouth, and soon had the prisoner out.

"Why, it's one of those blessed Dyaks," said Hull, "caught huntin' in his own trap."

Houghton said nothing. He was looking at Chaya, who had gone up to Saji. Saji was standing feeling his joints and taking deep breaths of air, and Chaya was talking to him.

"He wishes for food," said she to the others, "and to go with us; his canoe has been taken from him. He would get it back."

Hull had some biscuits in his pockets, which he produced, and Saji, after a rush to the river bank for a drink, joined in with the others. His strength and life had completely returned to him, and at the suggestion of Chaya he took the lead, being a better woodsman than any of the rest with the exception, perhaps, of herself. He had saved his spear. Even in the excitement of release he had not forgotten that, and he marched now ahead of them with the spear across his shoulder, leading the way, and piloting them much more quickly than if they had gone without him. Chaya and Houghton came last.

"He is full of danger, and he must not see us together," murmured Chaya, whose hand Houghton was holding for a moment. "If he were to hear *that*, he would try to kill you."

"Let him," said Houghton, laughing, but she released her hand. She seemed full of fear of Saji, not for herself, but for Houghton. Saji, however, had no eyes for anything but the road before him. Almost quicker than they could follow him he went ahead, so that dawn had little more than touched the skies above the treetops when they reached the lagoon bank.

The first thing they saw was the *Barracuda* moored to the opposite bank with the whole width of the lagoon between themselves and it. The *Bar-*

racuda's boat was tied up beside the yawl. Not a sign was to be seen of Macquart or his companions.

"Will you look at what the swabs have done?" cried Hull. "How in the nation are we to get across?"

"Thank God, the yawl's not gone," said Houghton. "That's the main point. We'll get across somehow. Let's think."

Even as he spoke, in the vague light that was now filling the world, they saw a figure emerging from the trees on the opposite bank. It was Macquart. He was carrying something in his hand. They saw him board the yawl.

"He's carrying a basket," said Tillman. "Look at him! He's emptying it down the fo'c's'le hatch. Lord! He's found the cache, and that's the stuff he's emptying into the *Barracuda*."

"Looks like it," said Hull, who was standing now on one foot and now on the other. "Oh, the swab! To see him and not be able to get me fingers in his hair. Come, boys, it's round the lagoon or nothing. There ain't no use in trying to swim, for the place is sure full of sharks. It's a fifteen-mile tramp, but we'll do it."

But Saji, who had been talking to Chaya, solved the difficulty in a quicker way. Plunging into the water and still carrying his spear, he struck out for the opposite bank. There were sharks here surely, but Saji had no fear of sharks. He had often swum among them. The Gray Nurse is the only shark really to be feared by the swimmer who takes care to beat the water as he goes, and there were none of these ferocious species in the lagoon or lower reaches of the river. Sydney harbor seems to be their chief naval base, and, though they cruise about the Pacific islands, they seem to give the New Guinea coast a wide berth.

They saw Macquart make off again among the trees with his basket; he evidently had not seen them, and then they saw Saji unmoor the boat. He brought it back, sculling it from the stern, and they crowded into her, and in less than five minutes they were on the deck of the yawl. Hull made a dart for the fo'c's'le hatch and tumbled down it. They heard him striking a match, and then came his voice:

"Lord bless my soul! The blighter's been fillin' her with clay——" Then a wild yell. "Suverins—suverins!" Silence and another match being struck. "There's suverins all scattered on the clay." He came tumbling up, his face blazing in the now strong daylight, and in one broad hand, which he opened wide, two sovereigns and some earth.

"Did you ever see the like of that!" he cried. "Haff a ton of clay the swab has shoveled aboard her with suverins all scattered on it!"

Macquart broke cover from the trees as he spoke, basket in hand and half running. He saw the men on the deck of the yawl, but did not notice them in the least. On board he came, brushed them aside, rushed to the fo'c's'le hatch, and emptied his basket.

They stood horrified. Macquart was no longer a man, though retaining a man's image. He seemed like a beast in the last stages of pursuit. The saliva ran from the corners of his mouth, his breath came in sobs and sighs, his face was gray-brown as the earth he was carrying, and it was evident now that, although he did not recognize them in the least, he saw them as figures, for he avoided them as, empty basket in hand, he made again for the shore.

Just as his foot touched the bank, Saji, who had landed, seized him by the arm. The effect was instantaneous and extraordinary. Macquart's mind, or what was left of it, dropped the idea that was fixed in it and seized upon the idea that he was being pur-

sued and seized. With a movement swift as light, he freed himself and dashed off among the trees with the Dyak in pursuit.

"Now we're done proper!" cried Hull. "Cuss that nigger! If he'd left that chap alone, we could have followed him to the cache."

"We'll find it without him," said Tillman. "It can't be far. Follow me, you chaps. See, there's his marks. Why, dash it, he's made a regular road."

They had landed, and, following Tillman, they made along Macquart's tracks. Tillman was right. Macquart, in those endless journeys to and fro, had left a road. Trodden-down leaves and plants, broken lianas, spilled earth, gave indications that required no skill in tracking to follow, and when they reached the cache everything was plain.

A burst gold box lay exposing its contents to the now risen sun. Macquart had not touched it. Earth and gold were all the same to him. He who had to empty the world into the fo'c's'le of the yawl against time had no time to bother with trifles, just as the treasure seekers now had no time to bother about him.

Hull, after the first shout of discovery, had cast himself down on his stomach, and now, laughing like a madman, was playing with the contents of the box, laving those tattooed hands of his in money. Tillman, absolutely crazed, was dancing like a monkey in the sunlight before Hull. Houghton alone held himself together. Chaya was there. As full of mad excitement and joy as his companions, the check of the woman, who was looking wonderingly on at the antics of the others, held him from any demonstration. He only laughed; then, turning to Chaya, who was laughing also, he seized her to him. She did not resist. They were as much alone as though the frantic Hull and Tillman were miles away. They were screened by the gold.

Then Hull came to his senses and began to talk almost rationally, sitting up and punctuating his remarks with blows of his fist on the ground.

"Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord!" cried Hull. "To think of poor old Mac gone cracked and shovelin' dirt and leavin' the yellow boys!"

It was indicative of the captain's mentality that all anger against Macquart had vanished to be replaced by furious mirth at the tragedy that fate had shown to them.

"Man and boy I've worked all me life for tuppence, and look at this! Look at me now, and Mac tried to fool me over the business, and look at Mac! I tell you, it had to come. I felt them suverins drawing me all me life, and there they are. I wasn't born to die pore. I was not. And now I'll sit in me kerridge and live as I ought. That's me. Me sittin' on the top of the keg and smokin' my pipe and Mac runnin' mad in the woods chased by niggers."

Tillman, recovering, was also in a talkative mood.

"We've struck it in the middle of the bull's-eye," said he, "and no mistake. That's what pleases me. We aimed for it and hit it. If we'd tumbled on this thing by chance, there wouldn't have been anything to it, but we've got it by going for it. Well, it's champagne for all of us for evermore. Amen."

"It's big luck," said Houghton, who was standing by Chaya. "But there's one thing that bothers me. Where are Wiart and Jacky?"

"That needn't worry you," grunted Hull, who was tossing coins on his thumb. "Mac's done for 'em as sure as I haven't. Went mad and done for 'em. Here we come and find him mad and them gone—done for 'em—that's what he's done. He'd 'a' spif-

flicated his own grandmother for haff a hapenny, would Mac, and here he was, alone with the nigger and old whiskers *and* haff a million pounds."

Tillman had picked up the basket that Macquart dropped in his flight, and they proceeded carefully to fill it with the gold in sight, a business that did not take three pair of hands long in accomplishing, while Chaya held the basket open. Then they set to, and in a moment located the next gold box.

"They are set side by side," said Houghton. "We won't have a bit of trouble with them, only we will want baskets. I vote we get back to the *Barracuda* with this lot and then rig up something to carry the stuff in. A piece of sailcloth will do at a pinch."

The others fell in with this idea. But, just at the start, Hull raised an objection.

"I don't like to leave this stuff alone with no one to look after it, and that's the truth," said he. "I ain't a narvous man, but it gets me on the spine when I think of leavin' this stuff to its lonesome."

"There's no one to touch it," said Tillman.

"Maybe not," replied the captain; "but, all the same, I'm no happier to leave it."

"I'll stay and look after it," said Houghton. "Chaya and I will sit tight here while you two get aboard and bring back the canvas."

"I'll be easier that way," said the captain.

He started off with Tillman, and they carried the basket alternately till they reached the deck of the yawl.

"We'll stow it in the saloon as far as there's stowage room," said Hull, "and the hold will take the rest. Dash me, if I like stowin' it anywhere. I'd sooner keep it on deck under me eye, but that's not to be done." He lowered himself down the saloon hatch, and Tillman was preparing to follow with the load when a shout from Hull down below made him start. He put the basket down on deck, and the next moment he was in the cabin. Hull was standing by the body of Jacky stretched on the floor.

"Dead," said Hull, lifting an arm of the corpse and letting it drop. "Neck broken to all appearances. Done for by Mac. What did I tell you?"

Tillman was too shocked for a moment to speak.

"How he did it, Lord only knows," said Hull, who was now as cool as a professor of anatomy demonstrating on a "subject." "There ain't no scratch that I can see. There ain't no blood; just the neck broke. He *may* have tumbled down the saloon hatch and killed hisself, but that ain't probable with Mac about. Most like he was done up by Mac and the whisker man, and then the whiskers got his gruel later on. No knowin'. But he's got to get out of here, and we've got to shift him. We've got to rig a tackle to the main boom and h'ist him. Let's get to work."

They rigged the tackle, and ten minutes' gruesome work got rid of the intruder. He went overboard with a pig of iron as a sinker, and the captain, quite unmoved, assisted in the removing of the tackle and the rousting out of some spare canvas to serve as a sack for the carrying of the gold.

CHAPTER XXX.

SAJI'S LOVE GIFT.

Houghton, left alone with Chaya, took his seat by the cache, while the girl sat beside him. If ever any man realized his ambitions in life, that man was surely Houghton. The one woman in the world that he wanted sat beside him; all the money he required lay before him.

"Chaya," said he, pointing to the cache, "that is what we came here for.

We have got it, and we must now go away. Will you come with me?"

Chaya laughed softly to herself. The woman they called her mother had no more hold upon her affection than Macquart. She had absolutely never known the thing called love till Houghton came into her life. She opened out her hands as though running over in imagination the whole earth, turned to him, laughed into his eyes, and held up her lips.

"That is well," said he. He held her hand, and they sat in silence.

All at once Chaya started and turned her head. Houghton rose to his feet. A voice from far away to the right came to them through the almost windless air. It seemed hailing them.

"It is Saji," said Chaya, who had often heard that hail on their hunting expeditions. "He is calling to me." She knew by the sound of the voice that Saji was either injured or in distress. She answered the call, and the reply came as faithfully as an echo.

"Now he will know," said Chaya, "and he will come here as surely as the snake to its rock." They listened, but no sound came from Saji. That wily hunter, having obtained their direction, was using his breath, no doubt, for a better purpose than shouting.

Then they heard him moving among the leaves, and a moment later he appeared from among the trees. He was crawling on hands and knees. He held the parang between his teeth, for his girdle had been torn off in some violent struggle. He was mortally wounded, and he was dragging along the head of Macquart by its hair. When he saw Chaya, he cried out, and, supporting himself on his left hand as she approached, he held up the head with his right.

It was the gift of gifts, the love offering of the Dyak warrior. It was more than that. It was the head of the man who had murdered Chaya's father.

Chaya did not know this, nor did Houghton, nor did Saji. All these actors in the drama were perfectly unconscious of the fact that here justice was dealing retribution; that here, above the gold for which Macquart had murdered Lant, Macquart's head was being offered as a gift to Lant's daughter.

Houghton cried out in horror, but Chaya, just as on the day when she stood watching the battle between the scorpion and the centipede, stood looking at Saji and his terrible trophy unmoved. She knew that it was his offering to her, and her love for Houghton had told her in some mysterious way the secret of Saji's passion for her. It was as though she were watching not only the savagery from which she was escaping, but the whole of that mysterious past which lay on her mother's side, stretching through unknown ages during which men, to gain the love of women, had brought them as love gifts the heads of men.

Saji, with one supreme effort, tried to rise to his feet; then he fell on his knees, on his hands, on his side, quivered as though a breeze were astir amid his muscles, and lay dead beside his trophy. As he turned on his side, they saw the cause of his death. The shaft of his own spear, broken off, protruded from his side. Macquart, in his struggle for life, must have gained possession of the spear and used it with deadly effect, only to fall a victim to the parang.

Houghton was advancing toward the body of Saji when Hull and Tillman appeared from among the trees carrying the canvas for the conveying of the gold.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE LAST FIGHT.

It was the morning of the fifth day after the death of Saji, and Hull and his companions were stretched on the

deck of the *Barracuda* in the shade of the trees, smoking and talking. Seldom have men worked as those three during the last few days.

Pig-iron ballast had been jettisoned, to be replaced by gold. The gold was stored in the cabin, in the hold, and in the fo'c's'le. They had worked surrounded by an aura. The thing was fabulous, and the labor like the labor in a dream. Nearly under them lay the bones of the *Terschelling,* the ship that had been taking all this wealth to China ports more than fifteen years ago. Its nonarrival had, no doubt, affected underwriters, caused talk, caused loss to the insurers of it, and then had been absolutely forgotten. Here it had lain dead and buried to all seeming, but its soul had been actively at work, weaving, weaving, weaving, drawing lives together like threads to make the texture of the pictures that forms this story.

Chaya was down below in the cabin arranging things. When Hull and Tillman got the truth of the matter, they had made no trouble at all about Chaya, though her joining them would make things a great deal more difficult on the return journey. It was arranged that she should have the cabin for herself to sleep in, and, during the day, except at mealtimes, the rest of the crew being condemned to the fo'c's'le. Not that this mattered much, as the crew was small and would be required most of the time on deck.

The incident of Chaya scarcely gave Hull and Tillman a thought. Gold fever and heavy labor held their entire minds and beings, and it was perhaps the exhaustion produced by these two causes that caused Hull, as he lay on the deck now, smoking and stretching himself, to forecast the difficulties still before them.

"There's a good many miles of sea between here and there," said he, "but I don't mind so long as we get clear of the coast. I wish we was out of this lagoon."

"What's wrong with the lagoon?" said Tillman. "It's been a pretty good friend to us, I think."

"I don't know anythin' that's wrong with it," replied Hull, "but I wish we was clear of it."

"Well, we'll be out of it to-morrow," said Houghton. "We have only to get the water on board and we can do that this evening. We couldn't go sooner than to-morrow. Lord! Every bone in my body is aching. I didn't ever think I could have worked like that. Do you know, we have been at it for five days without a break scarcely?"

"Seems more like five years," said Tillman. He had risen up, and was leaning on the rail, tapping the ashes from his pipe into the lagoon. While engaged in this, his eye caught sight of something. It was the prow of a fishing prahu. At this moment, Chaya came on deck, and her quick eye caught sight of the prahu. She called out to Houghton, and he and Hull sprang to their feet.

"I don't like the look of those chaps," said Houghton, "neither does Chaya. She thinks they must have got wind of what we are after and they've seen her. That old woman who calls herself her mother is sure to have raised the tribe when Chaya did not go back. It's nearly a week now since she joined us, and she thinks that the fishermen of the tribe have come up from the sea to the village, got news of what has happened, and started out after us."

"That's cheerful," said Tillman.

"I said just now I wished we were out of this lagoon," grumbled Hull.

"Chaya thinks that the fact of her being with us may have caused the trouble," went on Houghton, "and she says, rather than endanger you two and the gold, she is ready to go back. I would go with her."

"Now, we don't want any of that

sort of stuff," said Hull. "We've contracted to lift the girl as well as the stuff, and we're not goin' to be done out of our contrack by those chaps."

"We've got our rifles," said Tillman.

"Blow rifles!" said the captain. "Sticks is good enough to beat them off with." He went down below and got an ax; then, with the ax in his hand, he lumbered over the side and disappeared into the forest.

In half an hour's time, he returned. He had felled and cut up three small trees, and he carried the result of his labors under his arm in the form of three cudgels, each four feet long. Down he sat on the deck, and as he whittled at the weapons with his knife he laid down the law of self-defense by means of sticks to the others.

"I'll l'arn you somethin'," said the captain. "Don't you never try to belt a chap over the head with a stick till you have him on the ground. The p'int of the stick is the able end for fightin'. Use it like a bay'net. There's not a man livin' can stand up to the poke of a stick if the chap that's usin' the stick knows his bizness. Now these sticks is short enough to fend or break a spear with and long enough to dig a nigger in the stomach with. That's the p'int to aim at."

He spent nearly half the day over these weapons, and at sundown they started to water the *Barracuda,* Houghton and Tillman taking the beakers to the well they had found just inside the forest, while Hull and Chaya kept guard.

They slept that night on deck, keeping watch in turn. But not a sign came of any trouble from the river.

Then, just before dawn, they unmoored, and the captain, with Tillman, got out the boat and hauled the *Barracuda* out. They towed her to the mouth of the river, where the wind, setting from the land, fortunately for them, was ruffling up the lagoon water. Here they got the boat on board and hoisted the mainsail and jib, while the *Barracuda,* beginning to walk and talk, nosed her way into the river mists now breaking and making spirals to the wind.

The tide was ebbing, and as they drew along past wooded capes and deep, dense masses of mangrove growth, Hull, who was on the lookout, saw on the calm, dawn-lit sea, just at the river mouth, vague forms like water flies come to rest on the ruffled water.

"That's them," said he. "Look! They're waitin' for us. Now, you take my orders, and take 'em sharp! We're makin' five knots; we must make nine. Crack every stitch of canvas on her and give me the wheel."

He took the wheel, while the others flew to obey his orders, and the *Barracuda,* with all sail set and the main boom swung out to starboard, came along at a spanking pace before the wind that was bending the palm tops and spreading before them in cat's-paws of vaguest silver. The rifles, loaded and ready, were lying on the deck, to be used as a last resort. Chaya was kneeling by Houghton, ready to hand him his weapon, and Tillman, with his foot on his gun and his club in his fist, was standing by Hull.

Then suddenly uprose a clamor like the crying of sea fowl. The ten prahus that had been lying like logs on the heave of the sea swarmed into a dark line, and the line rushed to meet them. Houghton saw Hull as calm as though he were on a pleasure sail, standing, quid bulging his cheek, and great hands playing gently with the little wheel. Then suddenly the wheel went over to port, and the *Barracuda* crashed into something that went grinding away under the keel. At the same moment, something struck the mainsail.

It was a light spear, venomous as the sting of a wasp, and it stuck there,

slatting, and held from falling back by its barb, while Hull put the wheel over again to starboard, and twenty more spears fell "wop, wop!" into the water astern of her.

"Done 'em," said the captain.

Houghton looked back. He could not believe that it was all over. Yet there were the prahus all in confusion in the wake of the *Barracuda,* the wrecked prahu like a broken umbrella on the water, and the heads of the swimmers who were being rescued by their friends.

"They laid to get us one on each side," said Hull, "and if I hadn't shifted the helm and rammed that chap, they'd have got their holts—which they didn't. Well, there's no blood spilled, and that's all the better. Gad, boys, we've got the stuff away!"

The sun answered him, breaking up over the sea, and all the great, lonely coast they were leaving showed in its desolation across the water rippled with gold and strewn with the foam of the reefs.

Houghton, holding Chaya's hand, looked back. Then, still hand in hand, they went forward and stood looking far ahead to where the ruffled blue of the sea faded through the morning haze into a sky of azure fair with the promise of the future.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ENVOI.

One bright morning, two months later, the *Barracuda,* having hung off and on all night in view of Macquarie, entered Sydney harbor. Stole in unnoticed, storm-beaten and sun-blistered and foul with tropic weeds, the strangest craft that had ever made that port of call.

She and her crew, bronzed and tattered, and her cargo, invisible, but there, might have sailed in from some distant age when men made the world marvelous with their deeds and before machinery had made man commonplace as itself.

Chaya alone, sunburned and laughing and amazed at the wonders of this new place, was a whole romance in herself.

Yet no one noticed them—or only some early fishermen and a few longshoremen at the little bay near Farm Cove, where they anchored, and one of whom was sent hotfoot with a message to Screed—a penciled message which ran:

> Big luck. Come at once, and for God's sake bring some provisions with you.

It would be impossible to describe that breakfast in the musty, fusty, little cabin with the sun blazing through the portholes and the skylight. Wealth sat beside each of them, and the prosaic Screed, as he listened to scraps of the marvelous voyage, forgot even the gold he was sitting on in contemplation of the greater gold that lay like a halo around the work of these wanderers.

Chaya sat by Houghton—the only man among them doubly blessed by wealth.

THE END.

EDITOR'S NOTE: ***Now that you have finished this exceptionally good serial, and regret that the joy of it is over all too soon, we want you to begin another, which opens in this issue. It is a story of the North, by Bertrand W. Sinclair, whose novel "North of Fifty-Three" made such a sensation two years ago. If you remember it—and there's no doubt that you do—you will turn at once to "The Way of the North," on Page 95 of this number. We recommend this story without reserve.***

"Pretty Esmeralda"

By Albert Edward Ullman

Author of "A Knock-out Business," "Flim-flamming Wasser," Etc.

The camera man had turned the crank on a lot of stunts for the Mastodon Moving-Picture Corporation, but never anything like this. Featuring Wally Price, Marathon Champion

ISIDOR WASSER was not called the "Napoleon of the Movies" without reason, for he had reached his position of eminence solely because of his ability to think and act a day ahead of his competitors. Perhaps his maxim, "There ain't nothin' money won't buy," and the reason that he had a staff of live-wire assistants, had much to do with it, but the fact remained that the Mastodon banner had never been lowered to a rival since the day it had put on that first motion-picture serial, "What Will Happen Next?" "We have a jump on the others all the time," was the way Joseph Ganz, his chief assistant, shortly summed it up.

That it necessitated eternal vigilance upon the part of the little magnate and his assistants goes without saying, and they hardly had time to congratulate themselves over one coup before they were engaged on another. Incidentally, Mr. Wasser rather liked that comparison to the hero of Elba, and the sure way to his heart was to audibly admire a framed photograph over his desk, showing the Mastodon's president on the deck of an ocean liner, buttoned to his neck in a long, gray ulster. "How much you look like the great Napoleon!" was sure to elicit a smile from his generally sphinxlike face, and cause him to melt like a candidate for office. Though many of his directors did not think it, this evidence that Isidor Wasser was human redounded greatly to his credit. Indeed, it might have been said that he was entitled to a slightly exaggerated ego in view of his past performances in the movie world.

Occasionally, one of the other companies, especially the Plandome, headed by that Stein, regarded by Mr. Wasser as his most presumptuous competitor, would put something across on the Mastodon in the way of a "stunt" picture, but it was never long before the latter company retaliated with something even more sensational. Through this rivalry of the two corporations and the two directing heads, the movie fans were the gainers.

Hardly had Mr. Wasser purchased a tramp steamer and burned it to the water's edge, when his archrival turned to arson and razed a small building by fire, nobly assisted by the city fire department in a rescue scene which was carefully supervised by a publicity hungry commissioner. A month later, the Mastodon defied imitation by destroying a railroad bridge, already condemned, and having a locomotive and coach, resurrected from the scrap heap, plunge into the turbid waters of a shallow Jersey stream.

Thus "smoke pots" and red fire were largely abandoned in these "stunt" pictures, and realism stalked at the heels of the producers. No longer was it possible to do these things in miniature, for screen patrons had been educated almost overnight—they demanded the

real thing. From these mechanical "stunts" to human "stunts" was but a logical step, and so champions of the prize ring, famous detectives, notorious criminals, and persons of lesser repute and disrepute were engaged to entertain the estimated twenty million who daily attend the movies.

Now, to any one at all intimate with Mr. Wasser and his ways, the sight of him curled up in a large easy-chair, his lap full of papers, and an elated look upon his face, would have been only too patent evidence that he was about to put something over. The nature of that something was about to be revealed, for, as the little magnate made a queer clucking noise in his throat, indicative of satisfaction, his secretary entered.

"Joe just phoned, chief, that he's landed that Wally Price."

"Fine! Extra fine!" chuckled his superior. "Now we'll show 'em what a real Marathon is. Benny, did you ever see such a race?"

"Why, no."

"Well; you soon won't have to go to Greece or them other foreign cities to see one. The Mastodon will give it to 'em, with a great scenario and lots of thrills thrown in."

His subordinate smiled appreciatively and glanced with an air of ardent admiration at the framed photograph of the president.

"Some stunt!" he exclaimed.

"Sure! And besides that there Marathon—'a race for life and love,' as that writer party calls it—there's a fight with a bunch of Africaner cannibals or something, and a escape on an elephant. Here, look at that," he ended, handing a paper to his secretary.

It was a synopsis of a scenario headed "The Missionary's Daughter." The young man scanned it rapidly and looked down at his chief.

"I see it's scheduled for Fort Lee," he questioned. "I thought all the jungle stuff was made on the West coast?"

"Sure! Sure! But one-ring shows don't bust up every day, and you don't get a chance to buy elephants on the hoof as cheap as roundsteak, either. Besides, Travers can do it better than the others."

"Oh, I forgot, chief," said the secretary, turning at the door, "there's a queer young dude out there with a letter to you."

"They all have letters," groaned the magnate. "What's his name?"

"Duckworth—said the letter's from his aunt. I didn't take it, of course."

"That's right—that's right," complimented Mr. Wasser. Suddenly an abstracted look crossed his face, as if he was trying to recall some half-forgotten memory. "Here, Benny—hold on a minute. Better send in that young feller with his note."

He wheeled about in his chair and gathered the mass of papers together. "Duckworth," he muttered to himself, with a far-away look in his eye, "Duck ——"

Mr. Wasser's retrospections were interrupted by the entrance of a young man who was playing nervously and at one and the same time with a straw hat, a bamboo cane, a wrist watch, and a lavender-edged handkerchief.

"Mr. Wasser?" he faltered, in high falsetto.

That person gazed at him as if fascinated. The youth was slight, spindly, had a sallow complexion, and wore light flannels and a sport shirt. His mild blue eyes watered as they attempted to return the president's stare, and he let off fumbling with the cane, hat, and other articles to raise a shaky hand to a stiff pompadour of straw-colored hair.

"Stop that!" commanded the magnate, as Napoleon might have commanded his marshals. "You make me nervous. Here, gimme that letter."

"Yes—yes, sir!" trembled the youth, extending an envelope with a graceful gesture.

Mr. Wasser snorted as he noticed the pastel shade of the shirt cuff, but whatever his thoughts were, he did not utter them aloud. Instead, he tore open the note impatiently and perused the closely written page. As he finished, he closely scrutinized his visitor for a moment from beneath shaggy brows before speaking. "Huh!" he said. "So you're Percy Duckworth. It used to be Patsy like an Irisher, didn't it?"

"Why, yes, sir," was the blushing reply. "But my aunt changed it when she took me to raise."

The hard look in the little man's eyes became softer. "I knew your mother, boy," he said, and then hesitated. "I guess your aunt's an old maid."

"A spinster—yes, sir," came the mild correction.

"One name's as good as another," oracularly remarked Mr. Wasser. "And I bet she dressed you like Little Lord What's-his-name when you were younger?"

"Little Lord Fauntleroy! Why, how do you know?"

Mr. Wasser softened even more. "Well, now," he ventured, "a man has to know a lot in this business. So you want to go in the movies?"

"Yes, sir! Aunt Grace thinks I'd be a success," he hesitated, "and the money would help because——"

"I know—I know!" interrupted the magnate. "I'll give you a card to Fort Lee, and you can get work as an extra man. I'll have the director keep you on steady for a while."

"Oh, thank you so much," came the reply, in a grateful falsetto, as the youth minced his way out of the office, but Isidor Wasser did not hear. "Ain't it a shame," he bewailed to the empty office, "what one old maid can do to what was once a real boy!"

II.

The morning gathering of extra people at the big Fort Lee studios was even larger than usual, and Billy Travers, chief director of Mastodon movies, stood and looked them over with a quick and experienced eye.

A motley throng of young men; several groups of chattering, gaudily arrayed girls, loud of paint and powder, victims of the movie mania; a few actors, broken down or unemployed through some weakness, and several young people of both sexes from the near-by village made up the crowd.

"If some of those dolls'd wash their faces," commented Jock, the camera man, eying the feminine applicants, "they'd be pretty enough to kiss."

"Suggest it to them," grinned the director.

"I'm turning a crank all day," chuckled Jock; "I'm not turning crazy."

The line of extra people had almost passed before the director, as he made a selection here and there, when he was interrupted by the irrepressible camera man. "I can smell him coming—he must use eau de lily of the valley."

"Who? What?"

"What is right, I guess. Every move a picture, and he wears his handkerchief up his sleeve."

At that moment, the object of his derisive remarks reached the step on which they were standing.

"Mr. Travers?" he inquired uncertainly.

"That's me."

"I—I have a card for you from Mr. Wasser."

Travers took the card solemnly, and as solemnly read it.

"I see," he said. "Can you swim and run?"

"I can run a little."

The director gazed at him sharply for an instant. "Good!" he said. "Report

here to-morrow morning. A little thin," he added, in an aside, "but he'll make a native runner."

"You really mean it, Billy?" asked Jock, as he looked at the departing youth with a dazed air.

"I surely do—and, if I didn't, the chief's card meant 'Must.'"

"I guess you'll have your troubles, 'specially with that Marathon champ."

"I've already had more than a manager with nine stars and one good dressing room."

"What's he up and done?"

"He's already insisting on staging the picture himself, and what he don't know about it would make a public library look like a news stand."

"That's the trouble with all these 'stunt' freaks," agreed the camera man. "Regular people wouldn't pull it. What's the big idea, anyhow, Jimmy? It looks like skipping through more than a thousand feet."

"Five," was the crisp reply. "Sort of Stanley stuff in Africa. Race between white party—that's where Wally Price comes in—and native. Rescue of missionary's daughter on elephant. Back in Land of Liberty——"

"I know the rest," interjected the other.

"You're displaying real intelligence," smiled the director. Then his face clouded. "But I don't know what to do about the elephant."

"About the elephant?"

"Yes; the chief bought one—its keeper broke a leg or something, and I don't know how Otto'll be able to handle it."

"That's for the elephant to worry about," commented the camera man, "and mebbe Otto!"

III.

To begin with, the elephant would not eat. Otto pleaded with her and called her by her first name, which was Esmeralda, but Esmeralda did not respond. Vainly did he proffer her some wet hay, which had been exposed to the weather for several weeks, and the property man became alarmed. Suppose that Esmeralda should die of starvation? Otto did not know the value of an elephant, but guessed that ten thousand dollars was a fair estimate, and he had a horrible mental picture of being docked that amount, which was more than his weekly stipend for five years to come.

So worried was he that, at some one's suggestion, he went to the village library and dug into the cyclopedia. That portentous work was prolific on elephants, on their habits, their stamping grounds—everything except practical hints as to their diet and their upkeep, with the result that Otto spent a sleepless night to the tune of Esmeralda's trumpetings.

In the morning, he found the elephant still in the corral, which had been erected for one of the African scenes, and attempting to browse off a log hut. It was quite manifest that, as an article of food, the hut did not please her palate, for, at the property man's entrance, Esmeralda was engaged in wrecking the structure with a gusto that indicated she was an elephant of no sweet temper. Otto was nonplused. He was more than that—he was frightened. And at noon he was still engaged in pleading with Esmeralda to leave the corral for the privacy of a barn in the rear, to the delight of a group of extra people looking on.

"I don't know what to do," lamented the property man to no one in particular. "She won't eat and she won't do anything."

"I know," piped a shrill voice. "Here, give her these."

Otto turned to view the youth in light flannels and a sport shirt. It was Percy Duckworth, extra man, by the grace of Isidor Wasser and the need of Billy Travers.

The property man extended his hand and then snorted. "Peanuts!" he muttered bitterly. "Three of 'em. Some breakfast for a elephant. Ain't you 'fraid she'll get indigestion?"

"Why, no, sir," replied the young man seriously. "It's all I eat for lunch."

"Beat it!" bawled the property man, now thoroughly aroused. To emphasize his words the more, he slammed the gate of the corral back, thus shutting out the scene of his tribulations from the eyes of the vulgar and guffawing onlookers.

While this scene was taking place, Mr. Wally Price, Marathon champion, was occupied in relating to a breathless group in another part of the yard, the thrilling part he played in bringing the trophy to America. The athlete was neatly, not to say gaudily, dressed, and his rise from a position as a shipping clerk was evidenced by a plentiful sprinkling of diamonds over his person in the form of rings, cuff links, and scarfpin. It was plain that he thought no little of himself.

"That dago was behind me all the way," he was ending, "and if it hadn't been for a lemon I was sucking, I'd have given up the last mile."

"Well, you'll have another race this time," grinned Jock, who just arrived, "for there's the party you're going to run against."

All eyes were turned on the mincing figure rounding the studio building. It was Percy Duckworth, still tingling from the rebuff given him by the irascible Otto for his well-meant advice.

"Gee!" breathed the Marathon champion. "Do I have to run against that? I'll bet he drinks soft drinks the same color as his tie."

IV.

Billy Travers was giving rapid-fire instructions to the gathered company for the big scene in "The Missionary's Daughter."

"Now, Price," he was saying, "you start down at the forked roads, where the tropical plants have been laid out, and beat it like sixty for the corral. The native runner—that's Duckworth there—will try to beat you to it. Now, remember, you're racing to get word to the girl and her little band not to give up, for help is coming. You register desperation and determination, for they're besieged, and if the native beats you, the savages will burn down the shack or something. Hey, you Duckworth, if you can't last the two miles, you signal to Jock here, and he'll stop the crank to give you a rest."

The director paused for a moment and looked about him. "Where's Otto?"

"Here, boss," called the property man from one side.

"How's that elephant?"

"A little peeved, I guess; but she'll get over it."

"Well, get some of the boys to help you put on that harness. When I whistle, you send her in the corral, and Berenice and the others escape on her back. That elephant must crash through the stockade walls, and don't you forget to have putty on the arrows, so they'll stick to her hide."

"I don't know about that crash business—she didn't do it very well when I tried her out this morning."

"Then you get behind her and push or prod her with something. It's too late to get a trainer now."

"Huh!" grunted Otto to himself. "The boss talks as if no one but him has a wife and fambly. He oughta have my job once."

While the property man was indulging in self-pity, several autos were setting out for the scene of the start of the race. Wally Price, in a sort of pajamalike explorer suit and a helmet, was already in the first car. It was noticed, however, that young Duckworth, made up as a seminude savage, refused

to get in his car, but scrambled into a second machine with other extra men.

"My, that Ducky is proud—won't ride with Price," remarked Miss Montmorency of her older and more famous screen rival, Miss Berenice Traymore.

"I don't blame him," commented that little woman. "For the way that Marathon boob has been picking on him is a shame."

"If I was you, I wouldn't waste sympathy on any male imitation that'll let Price slap his face and only cry back."

"And why did he slap the boy? Jimmy Williams pulls that old joke of his and pretends to fall in the creek and holler for help. That Wally friend of yours don't make a move, but Percy, who can't swim a lick, jumps right in to help."

"It was only three feet deep," sniffed Montmorency.

"I knew it, and you knew it; but the new ones didn't, which makes all the difference. Afterward, that Price says he didn't want to wet his feet and catch a cold. Then Percy giggles and Price slaps him."

"Get ready for the corral scene," came the megaphoned call of Billy Travers at that moment, and the two leading women made haste to take their places near the stockade wall.

The start of the race which was to end at the spot where they stood was afterward described by Jock.

"The champ seemed to have it in for that Duckworth lad, for he started off at a fierce pace right at the beginning." he said. "For the first half mile, Percy kind of holds his end up, but after that any one could see with one eye that he was beginning to feel the strain. Well, after they cover a mile, with Price turning around and taunting him every little while, you could see that lad's heart beating through his ribs, so I calls out to him whether he wants to stop for a rest. At that the champ hollers back to him, 'Yes, stop; you little quitter!' and the only answer I gets is a shake of the head. After that—I guess you folks saw the rest."

V.

From the hill on which the corral stood, and which was to be the scene of the climax, the various members of the company and the extra people took their allotted positions, waiting for the word from the director. A half mile away down the road, a sudden cloud of dust told of the approach of the runners. Shortly, Jock, the camera man, could be made out standing erect in a moving automobile at the side of the road, while he busily cranked his machine and kept the camera eye focused on the two swiftly moving figures.

"Here comes Price," shouted Jimmy Williams, leading man, "galloping up like Sheridan twenty miles away."

Looking, the others could see the Marathon champion leading a stumbling, boyish figure by a good fifty yards. As they came into the stretch, young Duckworth appeared to be blindly staggering in the athlete's wake, but the loud call of the director caused the watchers to run to their places, forgetful of everything now but their work in hand.

"Now, go to it!" he shouted.

Hardly had he lowered his megaphone when there came a crash, followed by a scream such as no one there had never heard before. It was the cry of an elephant amuck, and their blood almost congealed with horror as they saw the huge animal shoulder through a great gap in the timber stockade and make for little Berenice Traymore, who stood rooted in its path. One shriek only escaped the leading woman before she toppled over in a dead faint.

No one thought of the runners as they reached the edge of the corral at that moment. The cry of distress had halted Wally Price; but the figure of

Percy Duckworth, an instant before on the point of dropping from exhaustion, seemed to be galvanized into action. As the huge pachyderm halted before the recumbent figure of the little leading woman, bellowing and stamping its feet in rage, a painted, boyish figure shot wildly across the cleared space and fronted the animal.

A gasp went up from the silent onlookers, as the panting youth and elephant faced each other. Percy was groping blindly for something in the breechcloth he wore as a native, when the elephant, bellowing once more, extended its powerful trunk and lifted his kicking, squirming form aloft. Once—twice—the maddened animal swung the struggling youth on high, as the little company stood horror-stricken, waiting for the thud of a far-flung body. It had all happened so suddenly—taken place in the space of a brief moment—that not a person moved.

Then, as the elephant swung the boy in the air for the third time, in the coil of its clutching trunk, a shrill falsetto voice cut the air.

"Pretty Esmeralda!" it cried, and, even as he spoke, Percy Duckworth's slender hand stretched forward and placed a small object in the proboscis of the elephant. For an instant the animal held the figure on high. "Pretty Esmeralda!" came the trembling cry again, and once more the hand placed something in the snout—then it slowly lowered the extra man to the ground, and nuzzled at the hand of the unconscious figure, which still held another peanut.

VI.

It was a rather silent company gathered at the big studio the following morning, and the absence of Billy Travers was at once noticed.

"Why, him and Berenice are over at the hospital," replied Jock to the numerous queries, "to see how Duckworth is coming out. Honest, folks, that kid has some nerve, some nerve. I've been turning the crank on a lot of stunts, but never anything like that. Mebbe he was handing that elephant peanuts right along, but he got a broken rib before he tamed her."

While this colloquy was going on, Mr. Isidor Wasser, president of the Mastodon Motion Picture Corporation, paced his private office, impatiently waiting news as to the extra man's condition.

"Joe!" he cried to his assistant for the third time. "When did you say they'd call?"

"Little Traymore said she'd phone the minute there was any news. The injury ain't so bad—it's the fever and him being out of his head. And maybe Berenice isn't sticking to that Ducky boy's cot."

"And why not?" ejaculated his superior. "Didn't he save her life?"

"Sure, I never thought it was in the little shrimp—having all that sand—and I guess no one else ever did."

"Oh, I don't know," replied the little man, with the smile of a mystic; "there's different kinds of sand, Joe; just as there's different kinds of blood. You know, I knew that boy's mother—and blood will always tell."

The ringing of the telephone cut off any reply the assistant might have made. He lifted the receiver and listened for several minutes.

"It's all right," he said finally, turning to the impatient Mr. Wasser. "Duckworth will be out in no time."

The little magnate breathed a sigh of relief and sat down limply in his chair. For some time, he gazed out of the window with an abstracted air, and a tender smile seemed to sweep the hard lines from his face for a fleeting instant. "I knew his mother," he said, like one talking to himself, "and blood will always tell."

Doubloons

By Ralph D. Paine

Author of "Homeward Bound," "The Wall Between," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PART ONE

Too old to begin in steam, and the days of the stately square-rigged ships being over, Captain Kempton finds himself cast ashore for good. However, he remains close to the sea, accepting a berth as caretaker of a nautical graveyard. Daily he dreams of treasure trove, and the hidden wealth of ancient freebooters. His daughter, Eudora, laughs at such notions; but one day she awakes to the dangers of his susceptible imagination when a glib fellow named Mannice palms off an old chart on her father—a chart purporting to reveal buried booty. Indeed, Captain Kempton falls a ready victim to the worn-out snare, and promises Mannice to put up money for an expedition to Seven Islands, the location of the gold. The job is undertaken, and they set sail, Eudora insisting upon accompanying them. Before leaving, she writes a hurry call for help to her lover, Dan Sloan, who is away at the time. Mannice and Captain Kempton discover their island. Digging is fairly under way when up looms another ship in search of treasure. This expedition has been manned by a Professor Bodge, who also flourishes an authentic chart. Bodge measures off his territory and begins excavating. The rival camps come to open rupture and a fight ensues in which the Mannice-Kempton cook is shot in the foot. Feeling runs high. Threats are made

(*In Two Parts—Part Two*)

CHAPTER VI.

THE big tug *Endeavor* had encountered trouble and delay in towing the crippled steamer which she was sent out from Falmouth to rescue. Strong head winds kicked up an uncomfortable sea, hawsers parted, and twice the tug was compelled to let go and stand by until the weather moderated. It was all in the day's work, but the mate grew impatient and was poor company at mess. Dan had left Eudora in trouble, and he yearned for some word. A minor regret was that he had not punched the head of William Marmaduke Mannice, who had so disturbed the peace of the white cottage by the harbor.

A week of battering struggle, and the *Endeavor* hauled her prize in past the Boston Light. At the agents' office, Dan Sloane found a letter forwarded from Falmouth, and his frank eyes were suffused as he read Eudora's message in which she had tried to hide the appeal to his courage and devotion. Wasting no time, he raced back to the *Endeavor* and interviewed her master as follows:

"I shall have to ask for a month's leave, if you please, sir. If you can't hold the berth for me, I'll have to ship in some other boat when I come back. This is a hurry call."

"Somebody sick, or have the police caught up with you, Dan?"

"Personal business, sir. And where the dickens are the Seven Islands? Ever hear of them?"

"If I bumped into 'em, I didn't know it. On the level, are you in trouble again? No, you wouldn't blush if you were, you hardened young sinner. Well, I hate to lose you. Come back as soon as you can. I'll find some kind of a mate to fill in with. We'll be idle, any-

This story began in the POPULAR dated March 20th. News stands will supply it.

how, for a couple of weeks. This last stunt plumb near jerked the engines out of her."

Dan thanked him and jumped for a roll of charts in the wheelhouse. Coastwise, said Eudora, and a short voyage. It couldn't be to the southward, for he knew his way through to the Florida Straits. Nova Scotia? The hasty search was in vain. He would try the hydrographic office and the government charts. Ramming some clothes into a bag, he waved his hand to the amused skipper, who assumed that a girl was at the bottom of it, and the *Endeavor* saw him no more. As he dashed into the hall of a building familiar to mariners, a spruce chap in a blue uniform hailed him gladly. Dan halted to smite his friend on the back and exclaim:

"Max Leonard, you loafer! How's the navy? Somebody told me battleships were hollow. Have you learned that much?"

"Promoted twice, you roughneck. Gunner's mate, second class, and eating up the book stuff in the hope of winning out an ensign's commission. Still in the *Endeavor?*"

"On and off, Max. Glory, I wish you were foot-loose for a few weeks. I need a pal."

"I am," grinned the petty officer. "My enlistment runs out to-morrow, and there's a furlough coming to me before I take another hitch. Name the proposition."

"To capture a schooner and a few little things like that. Come into the hydrographic office with me. I'm on a blind course so far."

"Sure, Dan," replied the gunner's mate, who appeared to take life as it came. "The lieutenant in charge is a friend of mine—not one of the chesty kind that tries to put it all over an enlisted man. We were in a destroyer together. I'm on my way to see him now."

They were affably received; and, better still, the lieutenant showed himself an expert navigator by finding the Seven Islands after pawing over several charts. He suggested:

"Go to Prince Edward's Island and pick up some sort of a sailing craft or power boat from there. Drop me a line, will you, Leonard? It's a safe bet you are up to something. Two of a kind, at a guess."

"The St. Johns steamer sails to-morrow," said Dan. "We are much obliged, lieutenant. Come along, Max. We'll eat and discuss things."

When the chivalrous mission had been confided to him, the navy man insisted on sharing the expenses of the relief expedition, but confessed that his balance with the paymaster at the Charlestown Yard was painfully small.

"It's not up to you to spend a solitary cent," warmly protested Dan. "This is my picnic. The saving habit didn't take hold of me until lately, but I'm a couple of hundred strong. We'll go as far as we can and swim the rest of the way."

A week later, they were bargaining with an amphibious citizen of Georgetown for the hire of a leaky sloop which looked unfit to take to sea. They could afford nothing better after reserving cash enough for provisions. So long as this dilapidated tub could stay afloat and carry sail, they saw no cause for worry. Notwithstanding the verdict of Eudora, a reckless lover had his advantages. A prudent one would have remained at home.

Light-heartedly they hoisted a threadbare jib and a rotten mainsail and filled away in a wind that pelted them with spray. This was sheer romance, and they loved it for its own sake, because they were in the lusty twenties. The sloop had a cabin for shelter, two bunks, and an oil stove. While one man steered, the other struggled with the frying pan and coffeepot;

and at night they kept her going watch and watch. When the straining seams took in too much water, they fell to with a hand pump and a bucket. A few days of this, and Max Leonard was haggard and heavy-eyed, for he was of a lighter build than the deep-chested mate of the *Endeavor*. But there were no complaints, and never a sign of shirking. The sloop held together, thanks to good luck and better seamanship, and they were putting the miles over her stern every day. What more could a man ask?

"It begins to look as if we might really fetch somewhere with this bundle of boards, Dan," said the gunner, as he sprawled in the cockpit for a brief respite, and rolled a cigarette. "Far be it from me to crab the game, but your plans are a bit hazy. If it's a case of sealed orders, isn't it about time to pipe all hands aft and loosen up?"

Mr. Sloan rubbed his head and appeared perplexed as he replied: "Eudora wants to see me. That's the answer. She's not the kind to borrow trouble. After we get ashore, do you mean, Max? I had no time to size this Mannice up, barring the fact that he left a bad taste in my mouth. Wait till we live with him a day or two."

"Get his number, eh? Is he bad medicine? Will he start something? How many men are there in the outfit?"

"Enough to make it squally for us if he has fooled them as he did Captain Kempton," said Dan; "but we'll drop in pleasant and peaceful for a friendly visit. I don't propose to queer myself with Eudora by hurting anybody unless I have to. She has a funny idea that I like disturbances. It was this way, Max. Towboat hands are a hard lot, and whenever I disciplined a roustabout, he would think it his duty to muster his friends in the next port and try to give me a trimming."

"Sure. You're a peace congress," scoffed the other, "and we are bound for Seven Islands on a diplomatic mission, all grape juice and kind words."

While the sloop labored on her course, the embattled treasure seekers were deadlocked in an armed truce. The only sane solution, of course, was for them to join forces and agree to divide the spoils, as suggested by Mrs. Bodge. The professor and Captain Kempton objected because each believed himself to be the possessor of the only genuine document bequeathed to posterity by the red-handed Peleg Peterson. Sentries continued to guard the excavations in which the eager shovels no longer made the sand fly. The sailors from the two schooners were ready to renew hostilities at the drop of the hat.

It was early in this lull that the owner of the island wandered over to pay his respects and transact business. Captain Kempton was in a testy mood, and this complication annoyed him. Elmer Stackpole hitched up his overalls, bit off a sector of plug cut, and pleasantly reiterated:

"Ten dollars a day for each and every day from when you landed. I dunno as I ought to be so liberal. Accordin' to the laws of this here Dominion of Canady, the treasure belongs to me; but I'm not a graspin' man and money is the root of all evil."

"But we're not digging, and I don't see any way to tackle it again without killing a few of those other fools," rapped out the skipper.

"Makes no difference to me, cap'n. Settle your own squabbles. You're here, and you look like a man that is sot in his ways. Be on my island some time longer, won't ye?"

"I intend to wear that addle-headed professor out," declared the mariner.

"Then I'll collect to date," cheerfully replied Mr. Stackpole. "No use to fuss. You ought to seen me before

you come here and landed. I'm a poor man, but there's justice for all in the Dominion of Canady."

"How do I know you own this island?"

"Step across and see my house, and I've got papers to prove it. Ten dollars a day is terrible reasonable."

With a sigh, Captain Kempton counted out the money. When not led astray by the glitter of pirates' gold, he had an instinctive respect for the rights of property. And he had troubles enough. He chuckled as Elmer Stackpole trudged along the beach to collect tribute from Professor Bodge.

Toward nightfall of this same day, a shabby sloop, her sails torn, crept toward the island. A gale had almost finished her, but no distress signal flew from the mast. Slowly she drifted into the bay and came to anchor between the two schooners. Two men jumped into a dory and pulled for the beach. Eudora's glad cry of recognition startled her father, who roughly exclaimed:

"I wasn't quite sure of it. Dan Sloan? What's he doing here? You told him, did you? He is after the treasure."

"How absurd! He—he never dared to call me a treasure," and she colored vividly, for her thoughts had betrayed her.

"I don't trust him," returned the captain, who was a man of one idea. "He may have half a dozen men hidden in the cabin of that sloop. I have heard some hard things said of Dan Sloan. He wouldn't stop at a thing like this. He must have figured that he could get here ahead of us."

William Marmaduke Mannice, uneasily hovering within earshot, had been smitten with a sense of panic. He took no stock in the captain's mad and foolish surmise, for he knew better. This formidable Dan Sloan had come to square accounts with him. Eudora had sent him some word, before leaving home, that she was unhappy and afraid and suspicious of the voyage. The island was not large enough to hide Mr. Mannice, and he therefore summoned his wits to aid him. The captain's outburst gave him a cue. Slipping away from the group, he hastened along the beach, crossed the barrier, and sought an interview with Professor Bodge.

The latter gentleman backed away as though expecting to be assaulted, but Mannice flourished a white handkerchief and explained:

"It's for your interests as well as ours. If we allow the men from that sloop to come ashore, there will be hell to pay and more of it. I know one of them. He got the tip before we sailed. Do you want another party in this quarrel?"

"God forbid!" the professor ejaculated. "Are you sure of this? They look like tough customers."

"No doubt of it. Captain Kempton thinks there are more of them aboard the sloop. This Dan Sloan, the leader, would rather scrap than eat. He comes from Falmouth, the captain's home town. Do you get me?"

"And your advice is to bury the hatchet and act together in the face of this mutual danger?"

"You're on. If they need food or repairs, all right. Our sailors can fit them out to make the next port. But they mustn't set foot on the island, understand?"

"I quite agree with you," assented Professor Bodge, who saw no reason to doubt the word of the enemy.

Mannice turned to look at the dory which had halted at some distance from the beach and was lifting on the small swells that rolled in from outside. Dan Sloan rested on his oars, and his fond vision searched out Eudora, who stood apart from the others.

"I came as fast as the wind would

let me," he shouted to her across the water. "Are you all safe and sound?"

"Oh, thank you, thank you, Dan!" the dearly remembered voice came back to him. "I didn't expect you to——"

Captain Kempton waved an impatient arm and interrupted: "It won't do, Sloan. Go back to your vessel. This place is overcrowded."

"Well, you have turned pirate for fair," was the reply. "And the other bunch of outlaws is swarming over to join you. Warned off, am I?"

"You are welcome to stay anchored in the bay. And I'll send whatever you need."

"Lend a man, then, to pump the old coffin out. Our backs are broken. A dozen of you against us? We seem to be outvoted."

Ingloriously Dan whirled the dory about, and, with unhurried stroke, rowed back to the forlorn sloop. It was an anticlimax, but Max Leonard accepted it like a philosopher, observing, as he scrubbed the frying pan:

"No landing party is supposed to storm a position against odds like that. What's the other outfit, the lanky gent with the gold glims? Who opened the door of *his* cage, I wonder? All bughouse, Dan. Here's this Captain Joseph Kempton. A lovely father-in-law he'll make, unless he comes to. He treats you like a burglar."

"Captain Kidd sounds more like it," said Dan, with a trace of resentment. "I was never any too popular with him, but this is the limit. They intend to patrol the island to keep us from sneaking ashore anywhere. Mannice will look after that. He is scared to death."

"Do we beat it, or do we stand pat?"

"We take the dory after dark, and we run the blockade, Max. Do you expect me to sit out here and twiddle my thumbs while the finest girl in the world is no farther away than that? Shame on you! Beat it? Is that what they teach you in the navy?"

CHAPTER VIII.

A black shadow of foreboding enveloped William Marmaduke Mannice. It might be possible to postpone the crisis, but sooner or later the implacable and muscular lover of Eudora would get him if he didn't watch out. As a profitable holiday season, life on the island had lost its charms. It behooved him to have other plans in readiness. At a pinch, he might pretend illness and persuade Captain Kempton, who could not be deaf to the dictates of humanity, to send him to the mainland in the schooner. And, while he warily awaited the turn of events, and kept one eye on the menacing sloop in the bay, he would endeavor to increase his emergency funds. He had done fairly well before leaving Falmouth, thanks to the captain's high regard, what with padding expense bills and extracting loans. But every little bit helped, and a modern gentleman of fortune could not afford to overlook the humble opportunities.

The moon rose late, and he therefore made an unostentatious exit from the camp while the night was still obscure. Blundering with difficulty across the island, barking his shins and swearing often, he discerned at length a lighted window of Elmer Stackpole's hut which served him as a beacon. The ragged lord of the isle was mending a net and contentedly humming that salt-water classic, "Whisky Johnny." At the entrance of Mr. Mannice, he produced a bottle of the same and two teacups.

"I was comin' over after supper, but my rheumatics is bad again," said he. "Fetched it to me, did ye? Ten dollars lawful money for your crew? Pay as you go is my motto."

"Guess again," sociably smiled the visitor, as he let three fingers gurgle into the teacup. "Happy days, old top. It occurred to me to talk a little business to you. We are both practical

men. With a proper start, you would have made a high-class grafter."

"Meanin' to say I charge 'em more'n I ought for ransackin' my premises?" protested Mr. Stackpole.

"Twenty dollars a day is too much," he was earnestly informed. "You never knew there was so much money in the world. Let me see. That first haul of yours amounted to a hundred, didn't it? And every twenty-four hours you ring the bell again. It won't do, Elmer."

"It was all settled with the cap'n and the perfessor, an' they didn't kick no more'n was natural, Mr. Mannice. You are wastin' your breath."

"Not much. We split it fifty-fifty. That means the roll in your jeans and the daily holdup hereafter. I shall stroll over in the evening and collect."

The businesslike announcement staggered the honest fisherman. He pinched his nose with a pair of tarry fingers, then solemnly gulped down another drink and querulously declaimed:

"A pirate couldn't use no awfuller language. Jokin', be ye? Red licker affects you that way? It was all settled an' agreed. I'll report this to the cap'n, that's what I'll do, as sure as guns."

"You will look pleasant and shut up," briskly replied Mannice. "And you will also put up now at once."

"What if I don't?" And there was an ugly note in the other man's voice.

"That's easy. The captain's pirate's chart is a fake. If he finds it out, he will quit the island. In that case, the professor will soon dig up the rest of the beach and pass up the job in disgust. Then you lose both parties. With my arrangement, you can still get your rake-off of twenty per, and net half of it."

"His pirate's chart is a fake—it don't amount to nothin'?" demanded Mr. Stackpole. "You're afraid to tell him so."

"I'll find a way to get out from under. That's my affair. It's safe to be frank with you, for you won't peep. Spill the secret, and it's all off."

Cupidity blinded the fisherman, and, besides, he was impressed by Mannice's air of importance. Even ten dollars a day was affluence. Reluctantly he reached for his wallet, but paused to say:

"It's to your interest to keep 'em all here as long as you can. S'posin' we call it an understandin' by which you use your influence to patch up the quarrel between 'em, so as all hands go on diggin' a few weeks longer. An' I'm payin' you as a kind o' silent partner."

"It sounds a bit less raw," agreed the young man. "Thank you. The amount is correct. The drinks are on you?"

During the course of this interesting interview, a dory moved out from the sloop in the bay and vanished behind a promontory with no more noise than a ghost. Like a gray shadow, it slid seaward, safe from the observation of a shore patrol, and then drifted while the two occupants looked and listened. Again the oars dipped gently in the muffled tholepins. The dory was guided among the submerged rocks by a kind of sixth sense, the quick ear detecting the murmuring wash of the tide where the eye failed to see through the gloom. The keel grated at length, and Dan Sloan waded to land, Leonard at his heels. Straight for the camp they headed, to approach it in the rear. There was no misadventure until they had drawn near enough to glimpse the flicker of a fire on the beach.

Dan halted and peered at something which moved in the undergrowth. Three strides, and he collided with the sailor who had been detailed to watch this landward side. The tussle was silent and exceedingly brief. The back of the man's neck smote the earth as his heels flew up, and a hand was clapped across his mouth.

"Stay with him and sit on his head, Max," whispered the victor. "If he acts fussy, poke him in the stomach."

"Leave me your necktie, you dude," replied the willing shipmate. "I'll rig a stopper for his jaw tackle. Good luck! Give her my regards."

That wounded sea cook, Harvey Mattoon, had been given a tent to himself. It stood at one end of the camp, a little removed from the others. He was sitting in a canvas chair with his leg propped up on a box, thinking his own thoughts, which were more distressful than ever. Another crew of treasure seekers to snarl the situation! Apart from this, he had nothing against Dan Sloan, a good-natured lad who had often tossed him a line and towed him into Falmouth with his lobster pots. Just then Harvey's sleeve was twitched, and he knew it was Dan himself that said:

"Steady! I made you out by the light of the fire. They can't see me through the wall of the tent."

"Jerusalem the Golden!" was the old man's epithet as he twisted himself in the chair. "The devil himself couldn't surprise me worse."

"I am a man of peace, Harvey, so don't yell for help. I want to see Miss Eudora. Will you pass her the word to slip out of the camp and—— But what's wrong with your leg? Docked for repairs? Gout, you rascal?"

"I was durn near assassinated, Dan—smack through this poor old leg of mine. The lunatic professor done it. Miss Eudora has had to take charge of the cookin'. Don't get mixed up in this mess, whatever you do. It's discouragin' enough now."

"A squabble over a treasure they haven't found?" grinned Dan. "It's high time I took a hand and discouraged them some more. And so you can't take a message to Miss Eudora?"

"I can call her over here," answered the cook, groping for a wooden potato masher beside the cot. "She hung a tin pan close by me, so I could whack it when I needed her. A clever girl, and kind as can be."

"The wisest ever," promptly agreed the infatuated young man. "And wisdom seems to be at a premium in this ship's company. Sound the alarm, Harvey. I'm pressed for time."

The cook struck the tin pan, and Dan Sloan could have sworn that his heart was beating even louder. A graceful figure detached itself from the group seated upon logs around the fire and came swiftly toward the tent. In the eyes of old Harvey, she was a ministering angel, but the mate of the *Endeavor* saw the maid of his desire, very human, warm, and true and tender but not yet won.

"Are you uncomfortable? What can I do to cheer you up?" she said, outside the tent.

"S-ssh! Steady it is!" chuckled the cook. "If you want to do me a favor, take this worthless roustabout of a Dan Sloan off somewhere and lose him."

Eudora's hand flew to her breast; she swayed a little and stared into the shadowy tent. Dan murmured a greeting. No explanation was needed. Without a word, she followed him until they were safely away from the beach, among the gray bowlders and the twisted firs. Too much the gentleman was this bold sailor of hers to demand a hearing for himself. Eudora's sense of obligation he felt to be a barrier, and it was unfair to take advantage of her gratitude. Let his presence speak for itself, his service plead his cause. Her arm brushed his sleeve, and her face was turned up to his as they halted. Her nearness troubled him, but his honor was strong to withstand temptation, and he fought down the words he longed to say.

"Oh, Dan! Did you really come because I needed you?" whispered Eu-

dora, with a sigh like that of a contented child.

"Of course you thought I would light my pipe with your letter and promptly forget it?" he asked, in his masterful way. "It found me in Boston, and I made two jumps, one to say good-by to the skipper and the other to reach the dock."

"I didn't imagine you would linger very long," she honestly confessed. "Who did you bring with you?"

"An old pal, Max Leonard. We used to sail out of Falmouth together as boys in a four-master. He volunteered for this cruise, on leave from the navy. I'd introduce him, Eudora, but he is busy sitting on the head of one of your father's crew, out here in the bushes somewhere."

"How awkward for both of them, Dan! Then I must stay only a minute."

"Oh, don't worry about us," was the careless reply. "We enjoy it. Now tell me about your troubles.

"They have all flown away," said Eudora, with a low, happy laugh. "I feel as though you had taken command."

"That's my humble intention, as soon as I get my bearings," he declared, not in a boasting manner. "You see, my dear, Leonard and I have come too far to loaf and look on. He is strong for kidnaping this swab of a Mannice and dumping him where the walking is poor. Would that help?"

"I don't know, Dan. He deserves it, but the mischief is done. My father is determined to stay here. This ridiculous Professor Bodge has a pirate's chart which I am quite sure is genuine. At least he found an old brass shoe buckle in the sand. And there is no reason to suspect his chart, while I am more and more skeptical about ours. But father flies off the handle if I dare to hint at it."

"Then why not shanghai your father?" hopefully ventured the briny cavalier. "Snatch him away from the island, and he may get over these delusions. Max and I can turn the trick as easy as falling overboard. Wait until he happens to be in your schooner. He goes off to her every day, I presume. We'll lay alongside in our dory, slam the companion hatch shut while the skipper is below, cut the cable, and make sail for Halifax. You can be with him, Eudora, and if you'll tend the wheel now and then we can handle the schooner after a fashion."

"But that is out-and-out piracy," mirthfully objected the girl. "And what becomes of the crew?"

"Let Professor Bodge fetch them away in his vessel. It's in a good cause, and what's another pirate more or less?"

"If you could only convince him that Mannice is a fraud! I am sure of it because he acts like one. Father is so honest that if this could be proved he would think he had no right to interfere with Professor Bodge. But what about you, Dan? It is so selfish of me to talk about our troubles when you and your splendid friend, Mr. Leonard, are even worse off."

"How do you figure that?" he blithely demanded. "We are busy and happy."

"They are bound to keep you off the island, and your boat looks as if she had made her last voyage."

"Oh, that frigate of ours has a few kicks left in her. We passed a sand bank a little to the west of here. We can beach her at low water and calk the seams."

Dan wheeled and stood listening, his head up, his tall figure tautly poised. There was a noise of floundering in the bushes and the rattle of loose stones. Surmising that Max was in difficulties with his prisoner, Dan begged Eudora to wait for him, and ran to the rescue. To his great surprise, he found the twain precisely where he had left them,

and, instead of pounding each other's countenances, they sat amicably side by side, and two cigarettes glowed like sparks.

"Ahoy, there! Is that you, Dan?" queried the naval aid. "It's all right. I've met this lad before. I put a kink in his windpipe, but he managed to cuss a few, and I guessed him as Tom Fallon. He owes me money."

"Out of Falmouth, is he? The red-headed dock rat! Wasn't he a deck hand in the *Dauntless* tug three years ago?"

"Sure I was, Mr. Sloan," huskily muttered the captive, rubbing his throat. "Why didn't you tell me you had come to call on a young lady? I'd ha' kept clear."

"He has to, Dan," said Leonard, "until he pays me that fourteen dollars," said Leonard. "I've got him sewed up. There's a spark of decency in him."

"Then what was the racket I heard? Listen! Somebody is coming from the other side of the island, and he's making heavy weather of it. Shut up, you two, and let me investigate!"

Mr. William Marmaduke Mannice had set out on the return journey after the business interview with Elmer Stackpole, and was indeed finding progress arduous. Once he wandered into a bog, and again the darkness so confused him that he mistook the direction and all but fell down a steep slope into the sea. Clumsily he trudged and groped until voices were heard; and, with a grunt of relief, he believed himself almost within sight of camp. Then a towering shape, of the dimensions of a giant to his affrighted vision, appeared athwart his path. Mannice stood as if petrified for a moment, remembered the sentry, and nervously exclaimed:

"It's all right, Tom. By Jove, you loomed up as big as a house. Spooky out here."

The apparition scratched a match to make sure of the fact. He had a distasteful recollection of that blandly patronizing voice. The flare illumined one face, florid, heavy, a little flabby, the other intrepid, candid, and humorous. Mannice yelped and dodged, his arm upraised. It was enough to upset a chap's nerves, this meddlesome sailor being positively the last person in the world whom he desired to meet alone in the dark. He tried to shout for reenforcements, but Dan Sloan was too quick for him. The mate of the *Endeavor* had been trained to action instantaneous and efficient. In his pocket was the wooden potato masher which he had thoughtfully purloined from the tent of Harvey Mattoon in the event of collision with more sentries. It was beneath his dignity to offer Mannice a fair fight. The slippery blackguard didn't deserve it. Deftly, therefore, he jumped to meet the awkward lunge and swung the humble potato masher. It tapped Mr. Mannice just behind the right ear, as intended, and he sat down violently. His eyes were full of stars, comets, and asteroids, not to mention rockets and pinwheels.

"If I have to do it again, I am liable to crack your crust," he heard young Mr. Sloan remark in a matter-of-fact manner, and the voice seemed to come from a great distance. "If I wasn't making a record for peace and order, I'd jolt the head clean off your shoulders."

The dizzy William Marmaduke put his hands to his head, as if to assure himself that it was still there. He was under the impression that nothing less weighty than a bowlder had hit him. The sailor stooped to prod him in the ribs with the handle of the potato masher, suggesting that he set his engines going as they must be starting for the beach.

"Me? Go with you? What the——" Mannice expostulated.

"Not so loud, my boy. Please don't give me an excuse to put your friends in mourning."

Mightily jerked to his feet, Mr. Mannice tottered in the direction indicated by the grip of calloused fingers which were using his left ear in the fashion of a rudder. A twinge more acute, and he obediently veered to starboard, the fear of death in his heart. It was far worse than humiliating. Max Leonard called out cautiously to discover whether these were friends or foes, and Dan informed him:

"Great luck! It's the fat villain of the piece. I stopped his flow of language, and he is coming along with us. Go back to your camp, Tom Fallon, or parade up and down and earn your pay. This is no business of yours."

"Tom is neutral, fourteen dollars' worth," said the gunner. "And he loves this Mannice."

"I'm a cross-eyed Finn if I don't hope you murder him," devoutly exclaimed Fallon, with which he showed a nice tact and withdrew from the scene.

"Forward march!" commanded Dan. "Give me a lift, Max. His knees have begun to sag, the big kettle of mush! We'll throw him into the dory."

"Aye, aye, admiral. Do we tie a weight to his feet, or does he walk the plank?"

"He would look ornamental hanged at the yardarm, Max. Let's get him aboard the sloop first. Then we shall have to sail out of the bay with what wind there is and find another anchorage. We want no interference while we are prying the truth out of this festive beach comber."

CHAPTER VIII.

As a man who had hitherto trusted to his powers of persuasion, Mannice was unfitted to cope with this cruel emergency. He was a liar himself, but he sadly feared that this brute of a Dan Sloan had a habit of keeping his word. Moreover, it would be no trouble at all to dispose of a corpse and leave never a trace behind. It was a piratical game from start to finish, and he had fallen into the hands of the most desperate freebooter of the lot. If jealousy were a motive, the abduction was a bad joke because Eudora, in spite of his ardent efforts to win her regard, had shown an increasing dislike for him—to the utter surprise of Mannice, whose vanity was great.

"I came here partly to win the little spitfire," thought Mannice, as they hustled him toward the dory. "But, confound her, I believe she would be mean enough to give me the laugh if she saw me now. I'm in the devil of a fix unless Captain Kempton pulls off some kind of a rescue stunt."

This was a hope to cling to. Meanwhile, the wise course was to be docile and irritate his captors no more than possible. Meekly, therefore, he suffered himself to be shoved down the rocks and dumped into the dory; nor did he have anything to say. Dan began to fear he had swung the potato masher too hard and inflicted some real injury.

"Piffle! You didn't dent his bean," said the unfeeling Max, as the dory moved seaward. "He's playing possum or scared stiff. I'll bet I could bring him to with a rope's end."

"No violence! I'm opposed to it," declared Dan. "At least, not till we have held a proper court-martial."

They steered for the bay, but drifted outside, for the moon was climbing from the sea, and already a soft radiance etched in dark relief the rugged contour of the island and trembled on the rippling water. This made it difficult to put Mannice aboard the sloop and smuggle him into the cabin without arousing the attention of those on the beach.

"Leave him in the dory with me, then," suggested Max. "I'll make him lie flat and stay put, if I have to fan him with the butt end of an oar."

"I get you. Slip me alongside the sloop, and I'll work her out with the jib until she is clear of the bay. They'll be glad enough to see us go. The old man will think we have chucked it up."

"Not if he knows you as well as his daughter does."

Most of the people in the camps went early to bed, and no alarm was raised when a windlass creaked and the unwelcome sloop moved slowly toward open water until her dory appeared to take her in tow. Harvey Mattoon still sat in the door of his tent, with his leg propped upon a box. The forced inaction made him restless, and this had been an exciting evening, what with the visit of Dan Sloan and the stolen tryst with Eudora. She, too, was wakeful and disinclined to leave the beach. When the sloop began to slide away so silently, she hastened to confer with the cook, who vouchsafed:

"He wouldn't run off and desert you, no, not for a million dollars' worth of Peleg Peterson's gold and diamonds. Mebbe he cal'ates it's rash to lay too close to a hostile coast, and I told him how dreadful careless the professor was with a rifle."

"And he will come back, you are sure, Harvey? He told me to wait for him, but I heard a scrimmage and that was the last of Dan. Tom Fallon said not to worry, but he wouldn't explain."

"Dan is maneuverin'," confidently replied the cook. "He may ha' been free with his fists in times past, but he knows when strategy is the winnin' card in the deck. You've steadied him, Eudora, and afore we left Falmouth I heard his uncle was mighty well pleased with him—Henry F. Bowers, the big man of the Blue Star Towin' and Transportation Company. If Dan gets out of this without landin' in jail, he's more'n likely to get a boat of his own. Cap'n Sloan, hey?"

"It's good news, and you do know how to cheer me up," smiled Eudora, "but poor Dan is not yet out of this. Neither are we."

"You can sleep easier than you have in weeks," said old Harvey. "Dan is maneuverin', I tell ye."

With a languid breeze, the sloop crept away from the reefs and then coasted along the western side of the island until her crew felt secure in anchoring so long as the weather should hold fair. William Marmaduke Mannice, who had been rudely flung into the cabin, was invited to present himself on deck and be sociable. His aspect was disconsolate, and he tenderly caressed his left ear. Courteously Dan waved him to a seat and observed:

"Tell a funny story. Make us laugh. Show us how your entertaining ways made such a hit with Captain Kempton."

"Nothing doing," was the sulky reply. "It's your move. Supposing you explain this outrage."

"Right you are," briskly spoke Dan. "Straight talk, eh? I'll put the questions, and you are the lad to give the answers. Here, Max, drop that potato masher! Don't intimidate the witness. Now, Mr. Mannice, are you a newspaper man in good standing? I left port too quick to overhaul your record, but I have a hunch that you were fired as a crook and were shy a job when you turned up in Falmouth."

"I found a story there that I could sell," muttered the other. "Anything wrong in that?"

"But you sized the captain up as an easy mark and better graft?" persisted the inquisitor. "You discovered that he was daffy on this pirate's treasure proposition before you found the chart in the *Wanderer?*"

"You accuse me of planting it?" hotly exclaimed Mannice. "You're

thick-headed enough to believe anything."

"Anything good of you? Wrong again. So you prefer to turn nasty and spar for time. Lead him to the pump, Max, and give him a two-hour turn at it. I didn't see anything of the man the captain offered to lend us. Make this sundowner sweat, understand?"

"Fine! Turn in for a nap, Dan. Where did I lay that potato masher? Come along, William. Make yourself useful."

There was no refusal. It suggested itself to Mannice that these scoundrels were stupidly playing into his hands. If he could manage to keep a stiff upper lip until daylight, his friends would miss him and at once search for the sloop. This was his chance of salvation, to avert summary justice on the heels of an enforced confession. This Dan Sloan was only guessing. He hadn't caught him with the goods. Obediently Mannice bent over the handle of the pump and began to lift the Gulf of St. Lawrence out of this leaky basket of a sloop. At first the motion seemed absurdly easy, this slow swaying up and down with so little weight to lift. He endured the first hour of it without protest while Max Leonard, the taskmaster, lounged with his back against the mast. Then, quite unexpectedly, the labor became a torture. He faltered, tried to stand erect, and was sternly exhorted:

"Pump, you begger, pump, or tell me the truth, so help you! Man, I'm ashamed of you, so grand and handsome, and curling up like a yellow dog. I had to stand one spell of four hours with that pump yesterday. Great exercise! Go to it!"

They were alone on deck, and Dan's snores were audible. Mannice was taller and heavier than his lithe, sinewy tormentor, and the dory trailed alongside. Overpower him, and freedom beckoned. Mannice considered it, shook his head, and knew he was a physical coward. Doggedly he resumed pumping, hating himself for his fear, and miserably conscious that he must collapse long before daylight. The gush of water from the spout became an intermittent trickle, the strokes feebly irregular. Max yawned, berated him for a worthless lubber, and invented dire threats. Mannice let the handle drop, slumped to the deck in an unsightly heap, and buried his face in his hands. He was weeping with exhaustion, pain, chagrin.

Max was profoundly disgusted, and yet he could not banish an impulse of pity. Instead of kicking the object in the ribs, he aroused Dan and announced:

"He's all in. You were too harsh with little Willie. On the level, he is a total loss, and no insurance."

"What! Did you break his proud spirit so soon? Is he ready to tell his right name?"

"Not to-night, Dan. He's fast asleep by now. It has been one of those nights for Mr. Mannice. This last stunt broke him."

This was the fact. They found him inert, wrapped in soothing slumber. By his head and his heels they carried him into the cabin, and Dan returned to the deck to stand his lonely watch. The sun had risen when Max poked a drowsy head from the hatch to say:

"Not a drop of water in the tank. I just drank the last cup. No coffee for breakfast? I can't stand for that."

"Then we'll have to go ashore and look for it. It's safe to leave Mannice. Lock him in. He is still pounding his sprained ear in earnest slumber."

"It is wiser for the two of us to land. If they are as fond of Mannice as we are, the whole beach will be turning out to find him."

So unobtrusive was the driftwood shack of Elmer Stackpole that they had failed to sight it from seaward, and

therefore assumed that the treasure seekers were the only tenants, nor in this hasty quest for fresh water did they delay to explore the island. At random they walked inland until a patch of greener vegetation caught Dan's eye. It was a bog surrounding a small pond of water which, although brackish, was fit for use. Bemired to the knees, after a long time for so short a distance to traverse, they filled two pails and toiled back to the shore and the carefully hidden dory.

It was very shortly after they left the sloop that Mannice had awakened with sundry groans and a dismal countenance. It would have been difficult to identify him as the debonair adventurer who had so beguiled Captain Joseph Kempton. He wondered what new disaster awaited him. The sloop was curiously silent; no voices, not a footfall on deck. He found that he had been locked in. Through the small, round windows, he was able to view the little vessel from bow to stern. Neither of his captors was visible. Waiting and listening a few minutes longer, he concluded that they had gone ashore on some errand.

In their absence, Captain Kempton might be searching along the coast and think the sloop deserted. This slender hope inspired Mannice to shout with all his might. If there had been a welkin in the neighborhood, indubitably he would have made it ring. He set up a frantic clamor like a foghorn. It rolled across the water and startled an elderly solitary in ragged overalls who just then paddled a skiff around a nearby point of land. The tide was right for catching bait, and Elmer Stackpole had crawled early out of bed. The sloop puzzled him, and the uproar proceeding from her cabin was worth looking into.

Sedately he rowed out, made fast to the stern, and hauled himself aboard. On hands and knees, he squinted into a window and was able to discern the lone occupant.

"Blazin' bilge water!" cried the hermit, by way of profanity. "What are *you* a-doin' of here? I thought you was several, jedgin' by the sounds. Serves you right. If you want to get out, hand up my fifty dollars that was unlawfully took."

"Will you promise to take me to my camp?" stipulated the prisoner, in no position to haggle. "Quick, now, or they'll catch you here and——"

"Not very popular with the crew?" grinned Elmer. "Tried to hold 'em up for ten dollars a day? I'm in no hurry. I've done nothin' to be shet up in a cabin for. Poke my money through the window and swear you won't make no more collections, and I dunno but what I may bust the padlock on this hatch and turn you loose. For the general good of humanity, I ought to leave you be and scuttle the sloop."

A roll of bills was shoved through the window, and Elmer made sure the amount was correct before he bestirred himself. With an iron belaying pin, he twisted the hasp of the lock and permitted William Marmaduke to emerge. The tousled young man lowered himself into the skiff with never a word of thanks, and Elmer pulled vigorously in the direction of the camps.

"Steer in behind the rocks as soon as you can," exhorted Mannice.

"Those two fellows will chase us if they get a look at me."

"Interestin', not to say curious," was the reply. "And who might they be? High-handed, ain't they?"

"Another outfit after the treasure. They took me to be the leader of our party, and decoyed me aboard their rotten sloop."

"Well, now, I call that quite gratifyin' news," beamed the thrifty fisherman. "It'll cost 'em ten dollars a day, same as the others, and I don't have to divide it with you any more."

"Take my tip and don't try to collect it," bitterly advised Mannice. "They will make you wish you hadn't."

"Perhaps I'd better wait and look 'em over. They sound kind o' different from the cap'n and the professor."

The skiff had disappeared beyond the nearest point of land to the southward when Dan Sloan and his comrade returned to their dory. As they put out for the sloop, Max said contritely:

"I felt almost sorry for the big stiff when he dropped in his tracks last night. Let's go easier with him and treat him more like a man. He is pretty near ready to tell all he knows."

"I agree with you," good-humoredly returned Dan.

In this praiseworthy mood, they leaped aboard the sloop, discovered that the cabin hatch had been slid back, stared into the empty cabin, and then looked at each other.

"Flown the coop!" said Max. "Who let him out?"

"Captain Kempton, of course. We bungled it. Honestly, I never dreamed they would be up and doing as soon as this."

"Nor I. Well, we have spilled the beans. Next orders, please. Do we march against the camp?"

"Breakfast first," decidedly replied Dan, whose expression was rueful. "This Mannice bird has certainly put it up to us."

CHAPTER IX.

Before undertaking another campaign, it was necessary to pay some attention to the battered sloop which displayed more and more unwillingness to stay afloat. Accordingly they shifted her to the sand bank which lay a little farther out to sea and let the falling tide leave her resting on the gently shelving bottom. As boys, they had built and patched, and tinkered with boats of their own, and they went to work with the handiness of sailors who knew how to make the best of the tools at hand. With strips of canvas soaked in a pail of old paint, they plugged the seams that needed it most. Then with block and tackle rigged to the masthead, they canted her over and stopped the worst of the cracks on the other side of the hull.

The flooding tide compelled them to knock off in the afternoon, and the sloop was towed to her anchorage. In Dan's opinion, after careful deliberation, it was advisable to attempt another meeting with Eudora and ask her advice. By this time, she might have persuaded her misguided parent to declare an armistice. If he would consent to an interview, these two unselfish argonauts were confident of their ability to adjust the absurd misunderstanding. They had come to help, not to hinder, him.

With this pacific intention, they started ashore after an early supper, but sought a landing place at the extreme end of the island in order to avoid being intercepted. It surprised them to sight a half-decked power boat idly rocking offshore, and Leonard exclaimed:

"What do you know about that! Has she been here all the time, or did she come up from the east'ard to-day?"

"More treasure hunters. This is the original madhouse," plaintively replied Dan.

They beached the dory, and had walked a short distance when a blue thread of smoke above the rocks caused one of them to say:

"Does anybody live here, or is that a camp that we overlooked? Let's reconnoiter."

Laying a course by the wisp of smoke, they came upon the lowly dwelling of Elmer Stackpole. On the chance of information, and hoping to bargain for provisions, Dan approached the closed door, but halted and motioned to

his companion. Inside could be heard two voices in earnest dialogue. A snatch or two, and Dan comprehended that it was no sin to wait and listen. Elmer's intonations were peevish, and he was interrupted by a younger man who waxed impatient.

"It's this way, Johnny," said the hermit. "You're bright and enterprisin', and I give you credit. I ought to be proud of a nephew like you. But I never did agree to give you that much money."

"That was my share last year," protested the nephew. "And this Professor Bodge was a lot harder to fool. He's a pretty sharp coot. It was a month before I got a nibble. And then I had to work it through a man in an old bookstore where Bodge used to rummage around."

"I set here drawin' them pirates' charts in the winter, an' buryin' brass buckles and rusty cutlasses in the sand every spring," complained the uncle, "and it was my scheme in the fust place."

"Didn't I write that piece about the old sailor that had Peleg Peterson's chart handed down in his family and was robbed of it in Nova Scotia? And didn't I get it printed in a newspaper and stir up a lot of talk about it?"

"That was last summer's party," corrected Uncle Elmer. "An' you was paid for that."

"But you are raking in extra money from this Captain Kempton," persisted Johnny. "He is all velvet."

"You can't claim no credit for him. He just accidentally happened," was the fretful response. "And he's liable to quit any day. There's two men come in a sloop to make a fuss and interfere with my business that's been regular established for several seasons."

"Yes, I've placed four of your charts for you, and now you squeal about a few dollars," cried the nephew. "What brought this Captain Kempton to the island? I never sawed one of 'em off on him."

"Somebody else stole your patent," grinned the old man. "Interestin', not to say curious. There's a smooth, fat rascal with the cap'n, and his name is Mannice. He told me their chart was a fake, and he knew all about it."

"Why did he give it away? Did he put up the job?"

"He was inclined to brag about it, Johnny. He bullied me into givin' him half my profits, but I got 'em back again. Naturally I wasn't liable to tell the cap'n on him."

Dan Sloan opened the door and walked in without apology. Elmer's dingy features were contorted, and the nephew turned pale. A clock ticked loudly on a shelf. There was no other sound. Then Max Leonard snickered. The tableau appealed to him as immensely ludicrous. Dan scowled ferociously, but his eyes twinkled as he said:

"Write it down and sign your names, both of you. Then we'll all pay a visit to Professor Bodge and Captain Kempton."

"Write w-what?" stammered the uncle.

"Get out of here!" declaimed the quaking nephew.

"With pen and ink, and we'll sign as witnesses," explained Dan, stepping nearer. "Make it short. You hatched one scheme, and Mannice confessed he was responsible for the other. Say, but you are a talented bunch. Peleg Peterson was a greenhorn."

"You are desprite men, and there's weapons in your clothes, no doubt of it," sighed Elmer. "An' your manners are dreadful bad, or you wouldn' ha' snooped outside. The law can't tech us. I'm owner of this island and entitled to charge rent to landin' parties."

"Not this summer. Give up the coin you grafted from the professor and the skipper."

Sorrowfully Elmer disgorged, after which Dan dictated while the nephew plied a tremulous pen. Their surrender was unconditional. Gloomily they affixed their signatures, and Dan pocketed the document. Escorting Mr. Stackpole by the arm, he led the procession while Max grasped Johnny by the collar and propelled him onward. In this manner, they crossed the island and marched out on the tented beach.

Eudora was first to meet them, and her triumphant champion rapidly explained matters. Her father was aboard his schooner, said she, and was there any way of breaking it to him gently? It would be a severe shock. Dan cogitated, and meanwhile William Marmaduke Mannice had approached, not too near, but close enough to become aware that the fat was in the fire. He cared to hear no more than mention of a confession and something about birds of a feather. And Dan Sloan was inquiring for him. He concluded that he had best absent himself from the excitement. Without delay, Mr. Mannice faded into the interior of the island.

"I just knew you couldn't fail, Dan," was Eudora's eulogy. "Now let me help. I have been perfectly useless so far. You can tell father that you have all the evidence, but don't show him the written confession, and say nothing about *his* chart. Let him think that Professor Bodge has been hoaxed——"

"And you will inform the professor that the joke is on your dad?"

"Exactly. I'll run right over to see Mrs. Bodge. She's a trump. And then, when these two dear, deluded men get together——"

"You have it, Eudora. I do want to let them down easy."

The tidings spread to the faithful followers of Captain Kempton, and there were no signs of grief. All hands had tired of this bootless, tangled enterprise. Dan Sloan sculled out to the schooner and boldly climbed over the side. The skipper met him at the rail and signified that he was prepared to repel boarders. From the beach, the pantomime was both vigorous and eloquent, the young man explanatory, the older one expostulating and incredulous. The victory was with Dan, for he was permitted to walk aft and linger beneath the awning. Gradually the shipmaster's gusty anger subsided. He found a chair and chewed a cigar while the narrator finished.

Wonderful to witness, Captain Kempton threw back his head and slapped his knee, while to those ashore was borne his hearty guffaw. He turned to glance at the professor's camp, and again his mellow laugh carried joy to the heart of Eudora.

Simultaneously Mrs. Bodge was telling her gleeful husband: "Miss Kempton suspected it all along, but she had no proof. Oh, yes, it's absolutely true. This sailor sweetheart of hers has the signed confession in his pocket. That odious Mannice deliberately deceived her father——"

"I knew his chart was bogus," shouted Professor James Hyssop Bodge, "but you couldn't tell him anything. Stubborn as a mule. Now he will clear out and let us alone, Ellen. He ought to have taken my word for it that our information was genuine. Can you imagine me being tricked as easily as that? Ha, ha, the joke is on Kempton, poor soul! He will feel badly cut up. But I mustn't rub it in."

Presently Captain Kempton disembarked, and Dan Sloan rowed him to the beach. The skipper was still jovial, but he managed to pull a sober face as he confided:

"Bodge will be a comical sight when you break the news. It would be indecent for me to crow over him. He was wrong and I was right, but you couldn't beat any common sense into him with a capstan bar. And so this

old rip of a Stackpole and his precious nephew palmed off a homemade chart on him, and he swallowed it, hook, line, and sinker! And a college professor, at that! He had no business meddling with it."

"I know, sir," demurely replied Dan, "but don't be too hard on him. He is a landlubber. It would do no harm to sympathize with him. There's no fun in hitting a man when he's down."

"Right you are, my boy. I shall go over to see him at once." Professor Bodge was already striding from his tent, and he met the captain halfway, at the rampart of sand which separated the rival excavations. Dan and Eudora followed, and Mrs. Bodge joined them. Smilingly the two leaders shook hands, and exchanged sentiments as follows:

"It is tough luck, Professor Bodge. You stood by your guns like a man, but those rogues had misled you."

"What a pity, Captain Kempton, that Mannice was so untrustworthy and carried you off on this wild-goose chase ——"

They paused, gazed rather wildly at each other, and began again:

"There appears to be some misunderstanding, Captain Kempton."

"Your language sounds hindside foremost, Professor Bodge."

"I was referring to your unfortunate fiasco, sir."

"And I was soft-hearted enough to want to express my regrets for your disappointment."

The skipper's face was growing scarlet, and he mopped it with a handkerchief. The professor's spectacles flashed ominously, and he stood stiffly erect. This was the precise moment for the intervention of Eudora and Mrs. Bodge. They bade the bewildered disputants be silent. Dan fished out the confession and read it aloud slowly, with convincing emphasis. A signal to Max Leonard, and the drooping hermit and his pallid nephew were moved into the foreground. There ensued an interval of trying suspense while the spectators awaited an explosion on the rampart. The captain glared and the professor frowned. They were too flabbergasted for speech. Soon the meaning of the situation began to dawn on them. They were tarred with the same brush, two idiots who should have known better, and the joke was colossal.

"And so Mannice told that old scalawag that my chart was a fraud?" thundered the skipper. "Mannice made it himself, did he?"

"And the old scalawag made mine?" cried the professor. "And he buried the brass buckle? My dear man, if we permit ourselves to be sorry or angry, we shall make the greatest mistake in the world."

"There is something in that," admitted the skipper. "Every time I think of you and your chart, I shall laugh to the day of my death."

"And you won't mind, captain, if I enjoy my recollections of you?"

"I am older than you, Professor Bodge, and I should have known better."

CHAPTER X.

There was no enmity between the treasure camps. The ghost of Peleg Peterson was laid, and no more would the dreams of his bloodstained booty trouble the minds and spoil the tempers of these estimable men. They were themselves again.

Cheerily the sailors began to pull down the tents and other shelters and bundle them aboard the two schooners. Harvey Mattoon had whittled himself a crutch and tried to help pack the kitchen gear. He bore the professor no more ill will. In his simple philosophy, all was well that ended well, and he would have a thrilling yarn to spin and a scar to show. He was the hero of

the expedition, whatever Eudora might think of Dan Sloan.

With so many willing hands, a few hours sufficed to clear the beach. A calm was on the sea, and through the afternoon the trim schooners waited for a breeze. Twilight came, and the air was still warm and breathless. Dan and Eudora sauntered along the deserted beach, and she was pleading with him:

"But you mustn't take the risk of sailing back in that wretched little sloop. Haven't I been worried enough? Father has begged you to go with us in the *Challenge,* and you act so queer about it."

"Max is game to make the return voyage if I say so," he replied, after a pause. "Of course, if we abandoned the sloop, it wouldn't cost much to square it with the owner. He said as much. But I couldn't stand it to be in the same vessel with you and—and —well, you know why."

"I want you to be happy, Dan. You have earned happiness." And the girl's voice was thrilling. "If you only knew how grateful I am——"

"I was afraid of that. I must have a tremendous lot more than thanks. I sail home with you on one condition."

"Tell me, Dan. I shall be glad to hear it."

"That the treasure belongs to me; the treasure I came to find."

They were standing at the edge of the pit in the sand where Captain Kempton had dug in vain. What Eudora might have replied was postponed because the loose stuff gave way beneath her feet and she slid to the bottom, Dan plunging after her. It seemed quite the fitting place in which to claim a treasure, and he was about to say as much when Eudora caught a glimpse of a small object which the shifting sand had disclosed.

"Another brass buckle?" she exclaimed, stooping to pick it up.

"No," said Dan. "The real thing this time."

He held it to the failing light. Tarnished and incrusted, it was recognizable as a bracelet, and the pure gold gleamed dully when he scraped it with his knife. Small but massy, to fit a slender wrist, it was studded with stones, and as he rubbed them in the sand they glowed one by one like blood.

"Rubies!" gasped Eudora. "I never saw anything so gorgeous. And they are real? Oh, they must be!"

"Not much doubt of that. This bracelet was made long, long ago. And Elmer Stackpole planted no imitation jewelry, only buckles and rusty cutlasses. I heard him say so."

"Then the pirate buried it, Dan? Shall I run and call father ashore? Perhaps Peleg Peterson did come here, after all."

Unheeding his reply, she sped along the beach. Her lover sighed and began to clear away the sand with a broken shovel which had been left at the brink of the pit. The schooner awoke with sudden noise and stir, and her company filled the yawl in a twinkling, Captain Kempton standing in the stern with a lantern in his fist. Aboard the other schooner, the professor and his wife observed the excitement and followed in excited haste. Harvey Mattoon, left behind, stumped aft on his crutch and sadly exclaimed:

"They're all off again to a good start, durn 'em!"

Eudora was waiting to display the bracelet, and her parent delayed only to glance at it as he sped to the excavation. Dan Sloan raised a warning hand and bade him descend carefully. The others held back while the captain lowered himself and the lantern. The shovel had by this time revealed the bones of a skeleton which had been scattered almost not at all. Blackened and fragile, ready to break and crumble at a touch, the pitiful relics pos-

sessed a certain dignity of repose, as though it were unkind to disturb this lonely resting place. So small and slender were the bones that Captain Kempton, said, his gray head uncovered:

"A woman, and this bracelet was on her wrist! Washed ashore from a wreck, perhaps from a ship that struck on one of these Seven Islands. Some grand lady of France in the days of the Seigneurs? God knows."

It was agreed, without dissension, to wait for daylight before digging in quest of more jewels. Dan and Eudora lingered behind the others, and she told him:

"I should like to keep just one ruby for myself. Would you like to have it mounted in a ring for me? Now will you sail home with us? Faithful and true, Dan. I am sure of it."

There was no need to announce the tidings of this betrothal. Captain Kempton was aware of it as soon as they went on board. It made him young at heart. Luckier than he, his daughter had found the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

Eudora and her bold young seafarer possessed a treasure of greater value than all the doubloons ever buried, and they viewed the voyage as brilliantly successful; but their shipmates, less fortunate, were eager to wield their shovels anew where the bones of the poor lost lady of the bracelet had been covered by the shifting sand of centuries. Another day they toiled without result, while Professor Bodge looked on and made no attempt to interfere. When they finally abandoned the excavation, he announced, in his most impressive manner:

"You fail to realize, Captain Kempton, that in discovering that bracelet you have made yourself and your daughter and your prospective son-in-law more than comfortably well off. My researches in organic chemistry have given me some acquaintance with precious stones. These rubies, probably Burmese, are genuine, I am ready to swear to that, and they are also of the true pigeon's blood color and marvelously matched. They are worth a fortune. I doubt if the sea chest of Peleg Peterson would have contained booty as valuable."

The shipmaster looked amazed, and then, like the gentleman that he was at heart, he exclaimed with gusto:

"Share and share alike, my dear sir. It's the only proper wind-up of the cruise. As a pair of fools, there was nothing to choose between us, and I don't propose to see you sail home empty-handed. My daughter and Dan Sloan agree with me. We divide the rubies."

The professor protested, but the mariner was as stubborn as usual. Soon a cool breeze stole in from the south, the white sails climbed the masts, and the anchors were lifted to a musical chorus. On the beach, in the light of the moon, appeared the figure of a solitary man who raised his arms beseechingly and shouted to attract attention.

Captain Kempton called to him from the taffrail:

"Good-by, and fare you well, Mr. William Marmaduke Mannice. We didn't forget you. We left you behind because we remembered you."

"Marooned!" observed Dan Sloan. "If he is really anxious to quit the island, he is welcome to our sloop."

"Homeward bound!" cried Captain Kempton, as his schooner slid out to meet the open sea.

"And the Bodges have promised to come to the wedding," exclaimed his winsome daughter, which summed up the whole matter.

THE END.

Thirty-Fathom Dan, M.D.

By James J. Walsh

A double duty undertaken at the risk of his life by one of the very last of the old-time "bucko" sailors

GROWLING at all outdoors like the rumble of a coming earthquake, Captain Carson thumped the saloon-deck rail with a tremendous fist and called upon all the known gods of the sailorman to witness if he lied.

When the captain commenced showing signs of typhoon weather, every member of his crew promptly scurried out of the line of fire. Cornwall, underwriter's adjuster, alone remained near the bridge ladder and watched the "Old Man" sputter.

"What's the matter with you?" he ventured. "You act as if you'd been eating dynamite. What's all the Fourth of July celebration for, anyway?"

"Why, that long-geared bohunk known as the mate let one of the booms come down by the run, and sent three of my sailors to the Marine Hospital, all broken up, and the rest of them quit on account of it. Here we are with the *Statesman* loaded for sea, and we can't get a crew for her this side of Callao, and all because that chisel-faced mud pilot is so popular nobody on the Pacific coast will sail with him."

"Make him go and find a crew," suggested Cornwall.

"He couldn't find an elephant if it was walking along the deck."

The figure of the mate hovered forward on the deck. He was testing barometrical indications at a safe distance.

"Say, captain," interrupted Cornwall, "let me go find you a crew. I think I can dig up a few old-timers along the front."

"I certainly wish you would," snapped the captain. "If you can't do any better than this jellyfish I've got, you ought to make a hole in Frisco Bay and jump into it."

"You're on!" replied Cornwall. "I'll bring you a crew on time or I'll resign my job."

"You go along, too." The captain motioned the mate. "You won't do any good, but I'll be rid of your objectionable mug for a while."

Out on the street, Cornwall and the mate puzzled where to go.

"Guess we'll try Russian Frank's," the adjuster decided, and was heading toward Harrison Street when he happened to glance up and saw the time-honored old sign of "The Bells of Shandon."

"We'll take a chance here," he muttered, and altered his course to come up to the door. When about half a block from the saloon, he broke into a run, for his ear had caught the sound of a deep-water chantey.

A hoarse voice, the kind that only those who have sweated their hearts out stretching the weather leech of a topsail can find melody in, was roaring out:

"And I lost my hat off Barnegat,
In a strong sout'easterly blow——"

This particular voice, which, once heard, there was no mistaking in the future, Cornwall well knew belonged to Thirty-fathom Dan, the one sailor-

man hated and feared by every crimp and shipping master from Nome to Natal.

"Shut up, you stone-faced pirate!" the adjuster commanded, as he shouldered his way through the swinging doors and faced a giant of a man standing in the middle of the barroom. "You're disturbing the peace and quiet of the neighborhood, and the ironworkers across the street can't make the rivet heater hear their several opinions of him."

"Well, be the seven blind witches of Athlone!" roared the giant. "If here ain't me old college chum from Mindanao!"

A fearsome character was Thirty-fathom Dan. He was one of the very last of the old-time "bucko" sailors that went out with stun'sail booms, three skysail yarders, and the tea clippers. He had acquired his name from the fact that he was the only man on the coast that could stretch out a heaving line full thirty fathom when making a landing. Timid skippers always desired his services, for they would never have any fear of wrecking a wharf if Dan stood on the fo'castle head to get a line ashore.

"Come over here and sit down," invited Cornwall. "I want to talk business with you. You've got to get me a crew and make a pierhead jump on the *Statesman*. She leaves at two o'clock for Seattle."

"Who? Me?" said Dan. "Allow me to inform ye, me country-born friend, me seafarin' days are finished. I am a man of means. I will be a captain of industry and build meself a mansion on Deadman's Island in San Pedro harbor. Ye want to know why? I'll tell ye. Because it's the only piece of ground left in the State of California that hasn't got a real-estate office on it."

"But, Dan," urged Cornwall, "you've got to stand by me for this once. I'll be walking the bricks of East Street if you don't."

"Well, me friend, as I am beholdin' to you for helping me float that time I went overboard off the Horn, thereby conferrin' on me the proud distinction of being the only deep-water sailor that ever came round Cape Horn on a hatch gratin', I'll consent to go this once. Let's pick a crew.

"Rowl up here, you omadhons!" he roared. "Seven men for the *Statesman*. The firemen paints the smokestack. Let's see; there's Scantling Bill, and Ginger-ale Brown. There's The Danish King snoring over in the corner. And we have Net-sling Hansen, and Laughing Johnson. When Highball Harry and Sagamore Jack gets through feedin' their faces on the free lunch, they might condescind to fall in."

Cornwall returned to the mate, and together they watched the men file out on their way to the dock.

"Quick work," grinned Cornwall.

"Humph!" growled the mate, and eyed the group askance.

When the captain saw that farewell edition of Morgan's buccaneers marching aboard, he almost had an apoplectic stroke.

"Well, in the name of the Lord High Keeper of the Cellar Keys, will you look at what he's shanghaiing on my ship! Hey, you gorilla-faced harp, I told you I'd punch a hole in you big enough to run the *Imperator* through if you ever crossed my bow again!

"Cornwall," he groaned, "where did you resurrect that anarchist? I've had three hundred fights with that savage in the last two years. He's forever starting a mutiny on every vessel he ships on. He's a trouble shooter, and you may take it from me we're in for a general war if we carry that dingbat on this trip.

"Say, Thirty-fathom Dan," he growled, "if you make just one break this voyage, I'll put you on crutches for

the rest of your life. D'ye bite that off?"

"Aye, aye, sir," responded Dan, and moved toward the ladder leading to the lower deck.

"That Fenian will drive me to the asylum yet. I tried for two years to get him off my ship, and couldn't do it. I believe I had a fight with him every day. If I hit him first, I licked him; and if he got the first crack at me, he licked me. That's the real strength of a bucko sailor. It isn't a question of how hard he can fight. It's his ability to always come back for more that makes him so hard to handle."

"I've been told he was a graduate of Dublin University," remarked Cornwall. "Some say when the matron at the Harbor Hospital gets overworked, she always sends for him to help her if he is in port."

"That's so," rejoined the captain. "He was at one time a clever surgeon, and he is yet if it comes to a showdown. But he had a wild Irish streak in him and he got mixed up in some of those schemes to overthrow British rule, and I guess he had to beat it in a hurry. I suppose, like a lot more good men, booze put a crimp in him. I wish he was more amenable to discipline; for I honestly believe he is the most capable man before the mast in all the world to-day."

North by Tatoosh and around the Puget Sound the *Statesman* steamed to load at Seattle. Lying near them was a new steam schooner, the *Rameses,* loaded for sea with general cargo and lumber on deck. Cornwall pointed her out to Thirty-fathom Dan.

"Aye," nodded the bos'n. "It almost makes me cry to see the way they're abusin' that fine new ship. The deckload is piled that high on her if you stubbed your toe you'd fall down the smokestack. I'll bet she's six feet down by the head. I wonder how some of them human samson posts ever got a license to load ships. I'm told if ye buy a brass-bound cap and a lumber hook from one of the 'Forty Thieves,' ye'll get a ticket thrown in, and I believe it, for some of them goofs I've been shipmates with couldn't go second mate of a Stewart Street boardin' house."

The captain spotted her and joined them. "Will you take a look at the way they've loaded that hog for sea? She's standing on her head. That fellow in the Scriptures that says 'the men that goes down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters, sees some wonderful sights' certainly had the dope."

That night, about eight bells, the *Rameses* cast off her lines and swung her nose down the Sound, headed for sea. The sky was overcast and dull, and the wind was southeast and rising. Thirty Fathom leaned over the stern rail of the *Statesman,* watching her tail lights disappear.

"She's steerin' like a bowl of soup," he mused, "and I'll bet that squarehead is in for the time of his life now."

He informed the captain, next morning, of what he had seen, and the Old Man grunted: "Have the after capstan well oiled, and see that the telephone to the steering engine is in good working order."

At ten o'clock, the *Statesman* let go her lines from the dock. It was blowing hard and raining.

"Bos'n," called the captain, "go aft and tell the wireless man to call up Tatoosh and see how the weather is."

Off Jefferson Head it was reported blowing ninety miles an hour, with a heavy sea running in the Straits of Juan de Fuca. A big steam schooner had just passed out, heading south, and lifting water over her like Niagara Falls.

The Old Man phoned the chief engi-

neer. "Give her all you've got, chief. It's all over but the cheerin'."

At six in the evening, the *Statesman* was passing out the Straits, right in the thick of it.

"Howly Mackinaw!" swore the bos'n. "This is worse than the big wind in Ireland. 'Twould blow the expression off your face."

The *Statesman* plowed forward, bowing her head to meet the coming seas. Every time she lifted, she pitched forty tons of green water along the fore deck. The forward-winch driver stood in the forecastle entrance and groaned and cursed when he saw his newly polished winches smothered in brine.

Up in the pilot house, the glass was pumping up and down like the walking beam of a ferryboat. The officer of the watch was out in the wing of the bridge, staring away into the darkness and praying to himself that if there was anything ahead of him they'd wake up and show a light before he was on top of them.

At four in the morning, the sky broke for an instant and showed a glimpse of faded moon. Then, low down on the sky line to the southwest, a Coston distress signal split the darkness.

"Call the Old Man!" shouted the officer. "And then go aft to the wireless and see what's the matter."

The operator opened the wireless gap and commenced calling, but received no response.

"I can't get him," he announced; "his set is out of commission."

Half an hour later, they bore down on the *Rameses,* flying signals from her foremast.

"What's the matter with you?" the Old Man roared.

"I've lost my propeller," yelled the schooner captain, "and my wife is so sick she's dyin!"

"What ails her?"

A huge sea rolled over both vessels at this moment, and all that could be heard was: "Send a doctor . . . baby!"

"Holy Mackinaw!" groaned Thirty-fathom Dan, as they shot the searchlight on her. "Every time she rolls over, she shows her bilge keels, and when she comes back you can see into th' fireroom. She must be goin' forty-five degrees each way!"

"Now," directed the captain, "when we get to windward of her, drop a life ring over the side with all your good heaving lines bent onto it and let it float down across her bow."

Full speed ahead through the churning sea they steamed past her, all hands standing by.

"Come about fifty feet closer!" yelled the *Rameses* captain.

"Fifty feet yer granny's black cat!" roared the captain. "What the devil do you think this is? A merry-go-round? Stand by to get this line aboard when it floats down to you."

Up to windward they hove to and dropped the life buoy. It was drifting down just right when the chain lashings on the schooner's deckload parted, and away went thirty thousand feet of good Washington fir into the sea, carrying the new lines and the life buoy with it.

"Score one for the opposition!" snarled the Old Man. "Hey! Bring along that Lyle gun and lash it to the fidfley grating! We've a few shots left in th' locker yet!"

Several sailors lugged the Lyle gun to the fidfley grating over the fireroom and loaded it with a full charge of powder, using a heavy wad of oakum behind the projectile.

"All ready!" sang out the mate.

"Look out now when I get into range!" shouted the captain.

"Ready! Fire!"

"Be jabers!" laughed Thirty Fathom. "You'd have thought 'twas a band of

Mexicans chargin' a restaurant! Look at them scatter!"

The mount of the gun was a piece of plain sawed oak, and the shock of the discharge split it in two. The shot with the life line went for the schooner about twenty fathom, and four hundred pounds of gun flew back across the deck and landed overboard somewhere between the ship and Siberia.

"Well, by the bones of Mohammed's big black dog!" growled the captain. "If that wouldn't blow yer bonnet into the creek!"

Five times they charged past the *Rameses,* trying to get a line on her by hand, and five times they missed. Even Thirty-fathom Dan, with all his great record behind him, couldn't make it.

Dan was watching the captain's face. He drew nearer Cornwall.

"Just keep your eye on me," he whispered. "Here's where I make him sorry he hates me."

Stalking up on the bridge, he addressed the captain.

"Captain," he began, "there's a woman over on that galiot that's maybe very sick. We have no doctor on board unless you want to class me as one. I have a scheme to board her."

"What is it, you big mick?" scoffed the captain. But he looked less harshly at the Irishman, for he remembered then the tales of this man's early days.

"Steam up to windward of her, and I'll swim for it with a light line."

"Beat it; you're drunk! I'll fire you in Frisco and sic the insanity commission onto you."

"Divil a drink, captain, though I could stand one right now."

"You won't get it, and you can't go."

"Then, sir, with all due respect to your gold braid, ye can go to blazes. I've swum farther nor that when I was salmon fishing in Alaska for a jolt of Siwash hooch before breakfast, an' I'll not leave that sick woman without makin' a good try to help her. Also, if we get a line to the ship, we can tow her in, and that means salvage. Just take a look over there. There's the *Farragut,* headin' this way, and you can take it from me he's shootin' solid gasoline out of his stack."

The captain turned a quick look inshore. "I'll be a murderer if I let you do it," he accused. "D'ye think you can keep afloat in that sea?"

Thirty Fathom stripped, and they rubbed him with crude oil. When a deck boy came aft with a life buoy, he nearly exploded.

"Take that thing out of here! D'ye think this is the swimmin' tank at Redondo?"

When he had everything ready, he grabbed a few fathoms of the light Lyle gun line in his hand, the mate telephoned to the bridge to stop the engines, and when a big green one came along, filling the scuppers, he calmly went overboard with it, the men paying out the line as he swam to leeward.

As he disappeared astern, the captain drew near to Cornwall, and they stood together at the bridge rail.

"Look at them tryin' to knock his block off with that coil of rope!" yelled the Old Man, as the bos'n went bouncing along the side of the schooner like a Chinese sampan. "I'll bet that line is cutting into his hide like a branding iron."

As the *Rameses* rolled to windward, Dan clung to the guard, and the watchers saw him hauled aboard. Even as he clung to the rail, he took time to turn and shake his fist at the *Statesman.*

"Good mornin', ye big Skalfagin mutt!" he addressed the skipper. "A crackin' fine mess you've got yourself into this time! Where's yer sick woman?"

"Shud oop, you crazy Irisher!" answered the skipper. "Come down pelow vonce undt get soom clothes undt

right avay soom schnapps. *Gott!*" he kept repeating. "Vat a schwim!"

Working like galley slaves, the crew of the schooner hauled a six-inch line aboard. Next came the bight of the new eight-inch line, which they made fast to the foremast, and signaled the *Statesman* to go ahead, slow. Anxiously they watched that fine new piece of manila stretch until it was no larger than a man's wrist; but it held.

"Now, then," said the bos'n, "I came over here to attend a sick woman; where is she? Also I'm afraid I'm goin' to have pneumonia from that swim. Have you any coal oil in the bottle below?"

"Pneumonia nodings!" answered the skipper. "You can't give walruses pneumonia."

They disappeared below, and the watchers saw no more of them for several hours. And Thirty-fathom demonstrated, during that several hours, that he had lost none of his skill as a practicing physician. He had arrived none too soon.

He had just completed dressing the new-born infant, after coaxing the mother to sleep, when the skipper shouted to him that the line had parted.

Hastily bundling the youngster close to its mother, he landed on deck in three leaps, and Cornwall was dumfounded to see their roughneck friend, his arms bare to the elbows, red hair standing straight up, a cook's white apron tied by the strings under his neck, cursing the crew fore and aft.

"May the Lord look sideways on the whole bunch of ye! Where's yer Lyle gun? Get it along here pronto! It's no wonder you fellows are the greatest menace to navigation on the Pacific coast!"

They lashed the gun and loaded it, and, as the *Statesman* charged past them, Dan sang out, "Stand from under!" and let drive at the smokestacks. The projectile went fair over her.

"I was a gunner's mate with Dewey at Manila," grinned Dan. "We didn't have any twenty-five-thousand-dollar gun pointers in them days, but we managed to put a few over the home plate just the same."

When the big ship fetched up, he directed the sending of another line, to which they shackled the anchor chains and signaled to go ahead once more.

"There, Haakon th' Tenth, if that carries away, ye can get out a few of these two-by-fours for sweeps and imagine ye are Eric the Red discoverin' Rhode Island, or else ye'll fetch up on the Farraleones. I must go below and tend to me patient. And if that ditty-box headed mate don't make less noise around these decks I'll whang him one on his homely mush. I'm fond of squarehead mates."

South they steamed for the San Francisco lightship, the Old Man having received orders by wireless from the owners to tow the *Ramcses* to Frisco. Twenty-one hours late, they pranced up to the Broadway dock and tied up, while four Red Stack towboats nosed the schooner into the slip astern of them.

Headed by the Old Man, two hundred frantic passengers from the *Statesman* stormed down the dock as Thirty-fathom Dan proudly marched down the gangplank.

"What is it, bos'n?" begged an aristocratic dowager in the van. "Have you been successful?"

The memories of his youth and his forty-odd years of battling with the sea shone in Dan's eyes and crept into his voice as he spoke.

"It's a girl," he impressively announced. "A fine, bouncin' girl. They're going to name it after me mother. Mary Jane Bjorkstrom. I am goin' to buy it a pair of shoe laces with me share of the salvage money."

And for the first time in the memory of his crew the Old Man grinned.

A Chat With You

NO matter what work a man does, or what calling he follows, what really counts in his work is the sort of standard he sets for himself and the way he sticks to it. The more trouble a man has in pleasing himself, the less trouble he is likely to have in pleasing others. Standards, and ideals, if we do our honest best to follow them, have a habit of growing higher and finer as the years go by. The critical faculty by which we judge our own work grows keener with use, and fosters in us a greater power to see and develop the finer points of our work.

THIS is the reward that virtue—which, after all, is nine-tenths honest, hard work—always brings. The man who works hard with his hands grows stronger physically. And the mental faculties are more capable of development than the muscles. Carelessness, slipshod work, the idea that anything will do as long as it brings in the money, have spoiled more promising careers than we would like to estimate. The author who destroys a manuscript that might be salable because it does not please himself is in a much better case than the fellow who turns out potboilers in haste because they are in demand and because he wants the money. The curse of all hasty, careless writing is its insincerity. The author doesn't really mean what he says. He knows enough of his craft to string dialogues and descriptions and incidents together and to make something that has the superficial appearance of a story. There are, it is true, lots of people who are satisfied to read such stories. There are people who don't care what they read so long as it is a story, just as there are people who don't care what they eat so long as it is food; but they are for the most part people who miss entirely all the finer zests of life and to whose blunted and capricious taste there is little permanent gain and no honor or satisfaction in catering.

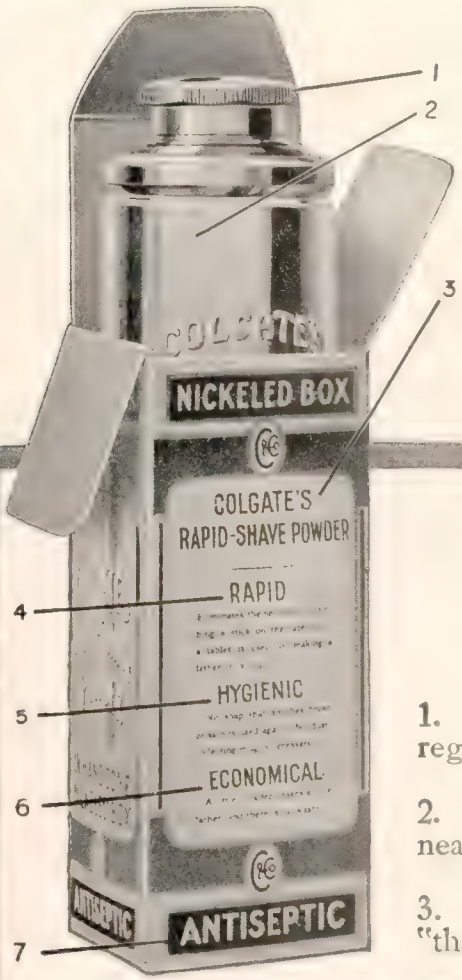
IT was with this idea in mind that THE POPULAR was started almost fourteen years ago. There were other fiction magazines at the time, but, with one or two exceptions, they were not magazines of good fiction. THE POPULAR blazed a new trail for the fiction magazine. It set an entirely new example. It was the first magazine anywhere to come out twice a month, and it was the first magazine to prove in any large way that there was a big, popular demand for fiction that was close enough to the life of the day to attract the man who cared nothing for literature and that, at the same time, had enough literary worth, earnestness, and distinction to make it worth while and actually helpful in a mental way. During those fourteen years almost every magazine has devoted more and more space to fiction; a large number of new all-fiction magazines came into existence, and THE POPULAR itself, from a very moderate beginning, has grown to a circulation and scope never before attained by any all-fiction publication. There is no secret as to the reason for the growth. All we did was to get the best fiction obtainable, to set as high a standard as possible, and to live up to it always. We have always felt that the words

"THE POPULAR MAGAZINE" were a sort of a guarantee of the material inside the magazine. It didn't matter who the author was. No matter how popular he might be, if the particular story in question didn't measure up, it didn't go in. It wasn't the author who was responsible for our guarantee. We were responsible, and we had to live up to that responsibility.

THAT'S the reason we can't have some writers in the magazine as often as we want. We refuse to force any man's production at the expense of his quality. Some write more fluently than others, but there is a limit to the productive capacity of every one, and when that limit is crossed, the stories must suffer. We wish, as do scores who have written us, that we could have more from Holman Day. But Day does not write potboilers or hack work, nor do we want him to. When you read his long novel, "The Forty-ninth Talesman," which appears complete in the issue of the magazine out two weeks from to-day, you will realize, we think, that such work cannot be done hurriedly. It is too big a story, there is too much in it, too much plot, too much observation of life, too much reality and sincerity for hurried work. A story like "The Forty-ninth Talesman" is something more than a clever invention. A story of that kind must really *grow* in the mind and feeling of the author for a long time before he puts pen to paper. And the experience, the insight, the knowledge and sympathy that such a story contains are gained only through years of living. It is a mystery story, a story of law and politics, a story of a winning fight against a drug addiction. It is laid on a farm and in the capital of one of our smaller States. Perhaps you will recognize the State when you read the story, although it is not named.

IN editing this magazine, the standards have a tendency to become higher. There are many stories printed years ago that we would be delighted to have all over again; but, on the whole, THE POPULAR is a bigger, broader, finer magazine than it used to be. The new series by Stacpoole, which starts in the next issue, "Stories of the Legion," reaches a mark of literary excellence which would have been hard to find in any magazine of ten years ago. You, yourself, if you have been reading THE POPULAR for any length of time, are more discriminating and harder to please than you once were. For THE POPULAR does many things beside amuse its readers, and one of them is to develop the critical faculty. There is such a variety to the magazine, so many good minds of so many different sorts have given of their best to make it that no one could read it for years without acquiring a better standard and a greater knowledge in regard to fiction.

IF our ideas about getting out a magazine were unproved theories, we would not talk so confidently. We feel, however, that the unexampled success of the magazine has proved them. We know now that when we publish any story of unusual and arresting merit it will receive its recognition. We know we have the right sort of readers. Such a story as "Men Who Serve," in the next issue of the magazine, we are sure will stir to a new enthusiasm a good many who thought that they knew all possible kinds of Western stories. We know that Sinclair's serial, starting in this issue, is going to make a hit, and that the excellence, technique, and arresting interest of Fielding's new mystery tale will reach those who know how to appreciate such qualities. Such a field and such a feeling of confidence are well worth all the work and money of the past thirteen years.



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2R22 – **A Charming Little Blouse** in tailored style, made of washable Tussah Silk. This chic model is prettily embroidered in silk to match color of material on fronts as pictured. It has a graceful turnover collar which may be fastened at neck in military style with sok loops and pearl buttons to match those used for the front closing. Blouse has long sleeves finished with turnover cuffs. Comes in white, flesh pink or natural tan pongee color. 32 to 46 bust. **Mail or Express Charges Prepaid, only..... $1.00**

2R25 – **Chic Little Blouse** of sheer white Voile elaborately hand embroidered on front with French dots in contrasting color. Blouse is elaborated both front and back with clusters of fine tucks and the turnover collar of sheer white Organdie is finished with veining and a piping of Faille silk which also trims the front and cuffs. White with embroidery and piping in rose or blue. 32 to 46 bust measure. **Mail or Express Charges Prepaid $1.00**

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THE AMERICAN TOBACCO COMPANY

The readers of the magazine may write to this department about any problem of dress Every question will be promptly answered, provided that a stamped, self-addressed envelope is enclosed.

AS we near warmer weather, you'll meet white flannels alike on Bellevue Avenue, Newport, and Fifth Avenue, New York. To be sure, they are most seemly in the country or at the seaside, for somehow they need field or water to set them off.

The white flannels I shall describe are a tiptop type of the well-cut suit. The jacket rolls softly and smartly all the way down. The pockets slant and the waistline is slightly hip-arched. Accompanying this suit are a low collar, a broad bow-knot tie, and a silk sash—horrors!—in place of a waistcoat.

The sash is an affair of personal preference. If you like it, wear it. If you don't like it, wear a white belt. Some men balk at the sash as womanish, though that depends more upon the man than upon the sash.

Monogrammed belt buckles of all sorts are outmoded, because the belt is now hitched around to the side of the waist, so that the buckle is not seen. This exposes a smooth, narrow strip of leather, which is much trimmer looking than the old-fashioned, ugly buckle.

It is given to few of us to sit on a polo pony like a centaur, or to play par golf, but every man jack of us can pass with honors the test of being well turned out at sports.

In dress for the links, as in that for the street or the waxed floor, you must be finical about the little things that are everything.

This doesn't mean being "groomed to a hair," for to interpret the spirit of sport one's kit must take on something of the rugged freedom of the open.

Foreigners are indulgent to very loose golf clothes, with no attempt whatever at a sleek fit. Their Norfolks are downright baggy, and their brogans are as scarred and notched as an old club. But—they look every inch the cool, wary sportsmen. It is the ingenuity of calculated carelessness.

A New and Sensible Soft Collar That Supports the Scarf.

Many Americans are prone to overdress for sports. Their suits and boots are crackingly new. However, that is a fault easily mended.

Before you can contrive the air of the worldling in your mode of dress, you must know the type you want to be. That type isn't the painfully perfect miracle of valetry, who makes your fingers itch to roll him on

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the floor and muss him up. The fop went out years ago, with waxed mustaches, pointed boots, and gold-headed sticks.

Naturalness is the be-all and end-all of smart dress of the period. And—there can be no naturalness without wrinkles. Evening clothes that fit the figure as right-and-tight as a drumhead are preposterous.

The "thoroughbred" is denoted by

One of the Fashionable Sport and Country Coats.

the wrinkles put into his coat with fine art; by his softly knotted tie; by his shirt, that gives and takes without bulging; by the absence of that odious razor crease from his trousers; by a silk hat clapped on with the casual detachment of "Please pass me the salt!" instead of studied before the mirror.

Enter the sartorial Burbanks, who jauntily attempt to cross formal clothes with informal, as white flannel trousers with a Tuxedo jacket. The fruit of this engrafting is chaotic and tommyrotic—a headless, tailless jumble that one needn't be a prig to cast off utterly.

If you can reconcile it with your sense of decorum to dance summer evenings in a tennis rig, go ahead. This sort of thing is done—indeed, over-

Off for the Week-End

You are never at a loss to "know what to do" when you own an "Old Town Canoe." There is never-ending pleasure in paddling around cool, shady stream or lake. "Old Town Canoes" are staunch and serviceable—the favorite of woodsmen. Price $30 up. 4000 canoes ready to ship. Easy to buy from dealer or factory. Write for catalog and get ready for the first days of summer.

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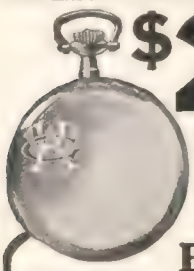

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Why stay **thin** as a rail? You *don't* have to! And you *don't* have to go through life with a chest that the tailor *gives* you; with arms of childish strength; with legs you can hardly stand on. And what about that *stomach* that flinches every time you try a square meal? Are you a *pill-feeder?*

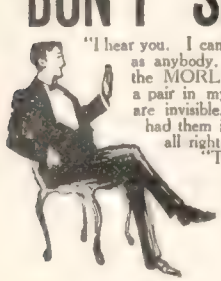
Do you expect Health and Strength in tabloid form—through pills, potions and other exploited piffle?

You can't do it; it can't be done.

The only way to be well is to build up your body—all of it—through nature's methods—not by pampering the stomach. It is not *fate* that is making you a failure; its that poor, emaciated body of yours; your half-sickness shows plain in your face and the world loves healthy people. So be *healthy—strong—vital.* That's *living.* Don't think too long; send 4 cents in stamps to cover mailing of my book, **"INTELLIGENCE IN PHYSICAL AND HEALTH CULTURE,"** written by the *strongest physical culture instructor in the world.*

LIONEL STRONGFORT, Physical Culture Expert
DEPT. 46 P, HAVANA, CUBA.

"DON'T SHOUT"



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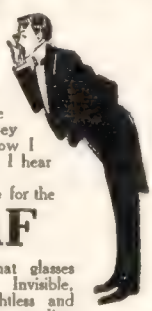

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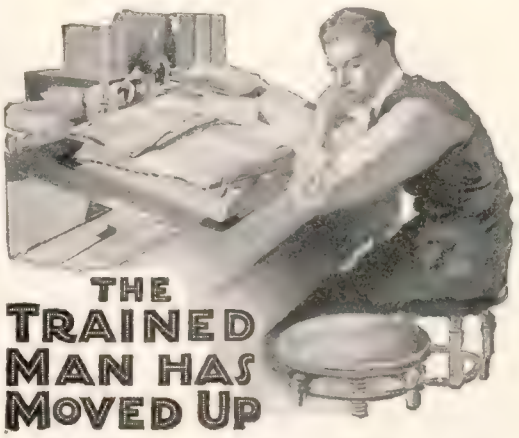

THE TRAINED MAN HAS MOVED UP

"Yes," he says to himself, "Bill has moved up and here I'm still at the same old job. Why they promoted him over my head gets me. I guess he must have a 'stand-in' with the boss."

It doesn't occur to him that Bill's rise to a responsible, well-paying position was due solely to preparation. He doesn't realize, like a great many others, that promotion comes only to those who prepare for it. Don't lay it to a "pull" if some other man gets the job *you* expect. If you don't train for it you'll have no one to blame but yourself.

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If you are dissatisfied with your progress toward a better job and bigger pay, the ***American School*** will give you advice that may change your whole future. We will, by a careful analysis of your answers to the questions we will send you, show you how you can advance in your present occupation, or, if we find that you are following the wrong line of work, we will help you to determine the occupation for which you are best fitted by nature and experience. This personal service is absolutely free whether you enroll or not.

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done. But to wear a Tuxedo jacket atop tennis trousers and white buck shoes slaps propriety full in the face.

Dragging the clothes of court and turf into the ballroom is bad taste enough without aggravating it by throwing a sop to convention with an evening coat to gloss the offense.

The only correct costumes for summer-evening dances are the black swallowtail suit, the black Tuxedo suit, or the newer white Tuxedo suit of serge.

All others are mongrel makeshifts that kindle doubts as to whether one has even a nodding acquaintance with good form.

In the Dictionary of Fashion, 1916 edition, there is no such word as stomach. Even if you have to touch ground with your finger tips five hundred times a day until you're limp as a rag and purple as a cherry, you've got to have a well-defined waistline. It's not a case of "Must I?" but "I must!"

The button-to-skip at the bottom of your waistcoat will help you appreciably toward getting a waistline, for the fad of having the last button and buttonhole placed wide apart, so that they cannot be fastened, has now spread to evening dress. So, too, have the waist-hugging set-in seam and the shirred effect below, as in afternoon dress.

If the accentuated waistline is desirable in day dress, it is indispensable in evening dress. The figure round as a barrel, or the figure straight-up-and-down as a wall are beyond the pale.

With the button-to-skip at the bottom of your evening waistline, the points elongated and tailored to tip outward, the set-in seam and the shirring (pleats) below, you can make a very passable pretense to keeping an unruly waistline in subjugation.

In the mountains or at the fashionable watering places, the dinner or dance (Tuxedo) suit of white serge is very smart. Launched several years ago, it has inched into vogue, until it is now generally accepted as "the thing" for out of town, though not for urban wear.

The white serge suit is cut precisely like the black suit, save that the waistcoat is omitted for greater comfort in dancing, and one wears white hose and white buck pumps or Oxfords.

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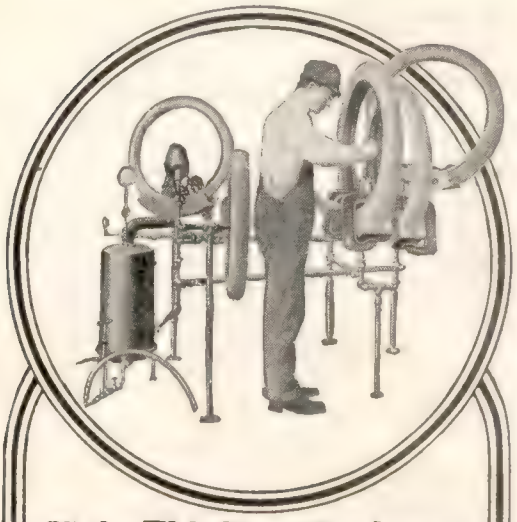

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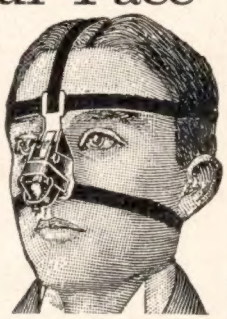
You Have A Beautiful Face
But Your Nose?

In this day and age attention to your appearance is an absolute necessity if you expect to make the most out of life. Not only should you wish to appear as attractive as possible for your own self-satisfaction, which is alone well worth your efforts, but you will find the world in general judging you greatly, if not wholly, by your "looks," therefore it pays to "look your best" at all times. PERMIT NO ONE TO SEE YOU LOOKING OTHERWISE; it will injure your welfare! Upon the impression you constantly make rests the failure or success of your life. Which is to be your ultimate destiny? My new nose-shaper "Travlos" (Model 22) corrects now ill-shaped noses without operation quickly, safely and permanently. Is pleasant and does not interfere with one's daily occupation being worn at night. Write today for free booklet, which tells you how to correct ill-shaped noses without cost if not satisfactory. **M. TRILETY, Face Specialist, 463 Ackerman Building, Binghamton, N. Y.**

Before

After



You know this trade-mark through National Periodical Advertising

TRADE - MARKS are the guides which enable the purchaser to repeat every satisfactory buying experience and to avoid the repetition of every unsatisfactory buying experience.

National advertising is the force which induces a great number of people to *try* a product—so that the economy of quantity production can be attained if the product gets general approval.

The trade-mark is the thing which identifies a maker so that we can repeat—or avoid repeating—the experience we have with his goods.

National advertising is the thing which makes *enough of us* use a product so that it can be produced economically and can be sold to us at a price much lower than the manufacturer would have to charge if he sold to only a few.

These are the reasons why trade-marked, nationally advertised goods are so generally the best goods of their kind and are sold at such relatively low prices.

Trade-marks and national advertising, working together are the two most valuable public servants in business today. Their whole tendency is to raise qualities and standardize them, while reducing prices and stabilizing them.

TWICE-A-MONTH
The Popular Magazine

MEMBER OF THE QUOIN CLUB.
THE NATIONAL PERIODICAL ASSOCIATION

The Smoke of the U. S. A.

That snappy, spirited taste of "Bull" Durham in a cigarette gives you the quick-stepping, head-up-and-chest-out feeling of the live, virile Man in Khaki. *He* smokes "Bull" Durham for the sparkle that's in it and the crisp, youthful vigor he gets out of it.

GENUINE

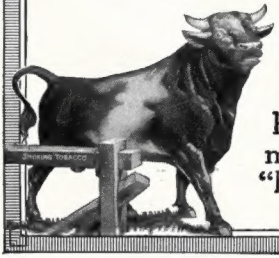
"BULL" DURHAM

SMOKING TOBACCO

Ask for FREE package of "papers" with each 5c sack.

"Roll your own" with "Bull" Durham and you have a distinctive, satisfying smoke that can't be equalled by any other tobacco in the world.

In its perfect mildness, its smooth, rich mellow-sweetness and its aromatic fragrance, "Bull" Durham is unique. For the last word in wholesome, healthful smoking enjoyment "roll your own" with "Bull" Durham.



THE AMERICAN TOBACCO COMPANY

Take a KODAK with you

EASTMAN KODAK CO., Rochester, N. Y., *The Kodak City*